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**WOMEN AND WOMEN'S VOICES:  
THEIR LITERARY EXPRESSION IN FRANCE  
c.1500 - c.1540**

by

**PHILLIPA LINDSEY TAWN**

**A thesis presented for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy at the  
University of Durham**

**Department of French  
University of Durham  
England**

**October 1993**



**28 MAR 1994**

## ABSTRACT

WOMEN AND WOMEN'S VOICES:  
THEIR LITERARY EXPRESSION IN FRANCE c.1500 - c.1540

By PHILLIPA LINDSEY TAWN

The purpose of this thesis is to examine woman as reader and writer in early sixteenth-century France. As a focal point to the study, I concentrate on the theme of speech. The exclusion of the Renaissance woman from mixed-sex conversations allows us to perceive her writing as a form of vicarious speech.

The thesis is divided into two distinct parts. Part 1 (Chapters 1-3) deals with various images and stereotypes of the female sex, which feature in texts by male writers. Chapter 1 discusses the behavioural models set out in etiquette books, while emphasizing the differing ideals for each of the sexes. A comparison of these role models shows that all aspects of the ideal for the female sex, revolving around a central concern with chastity, seek to curb feminine behaviour. Chapter 2 explores the notion of male writing as a public dialogue in which woman frequently becomes the subject of scurrilous debate. In works such as the *Blasons Anatomiques* and the French emblems, the male poet-cum-artisan moulds and sculpts his ideal image of woman, transforming her into a voiceless artefact. The attitude of these writers towards women tends to be aggressive, or even overtly sadistic. My third chapter is devoted to the examination of literary representations of the sixteenth-century wife. In Chapters 1-3, emphasis is placed on woman's position as the forgotten or ignored listener, her presence needed only for a silent appreciation of male rhetoric.

Part 2 (Chapters 4-5) concentrates on texts composed by women, grouping works into the categories of secular, and then devotional writings. The aim of these chapters is to rediscover writers whose works have been obscured by time. Consequently, many of the texts studied have never been previously analysed in such detail, or examined from a literary perspective. By recreating a chain of women writers, we may establish the continuity of a female tradition in the Renaissance period. Certain stylistic and thematic characteristics recur in the works of all women writers. In my analysis of feminine writing, these similarities are attributed to the social constraints shared by all women attempting to assert a voice in a male-dominated discourse.



*for Frédéric*

'Soubs espoir que vous, et les humains lecteurs excuserez le rude et mal agencé langaige. C'est oeuvre de femme, d'où ne peult sortir ouvraige si limé, que bien seroit d'ung homme discretz en ses escriptz'

(Jeanne Flore, *Comptes Amoureux*, p.97).

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## PREFACE

Throughout this thesis, wherever possible, I have quoted works in either French or English. For this reason, I have used an eighteenth-century French translation of Erasmus' *Christiani Matrimonii Institutio*. The work does not, as yet, appear in the Toronto edition of the *Collected Works of Erasmus*. For the same reason, I have used a seventeenth-century French translation of Barbaro's *De Re Uxoriam*.

In Part 2 of my thesis, when discussing women writers, I have included sections on two women who were writing in Geneva in the early sixteenth century. Although the aim of this thesis is principally to study the literary expression of women's voices in *France*, I feel justified in discussing the works of Marie Dentièrre and Jeanne de Jussie on account of the close political and cultural ties linking Geneva with France during this period. Moreover, the works by both these women were composed in the French vernacular.

When quoting from sixteenth-century editions or manuscripts, I have slightly modernized the original spelling, changing *u* to *v*, and *i* to *j*. I have also added punctuation when necessary, written abbreviations out in full and included accents to avoid ambiguity.

No part of the material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for any degree in the University of Durham or any other university.

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I should like to make special mention of my own mother who cannot be thanked enough for her care and encouragement, as well as for her financial generosity. In addition, I would like to thank her for being an exceptionally helpful proof reader. Finally, I wish to thank my future husband, Frédéric Veyssière, to whom I have dedicated this thesis. He has been an unfailing source of love and patience over the last few years. It has been, more than anything else, his genuine interest and respect for my research which have given me the confidence to write this thesis.

PART ONE

WOMEN





## INTRODUCTION

### PART ONE

In the French translation of Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528), the written word is perceived as being an image of preserved speech:

L'escripture n'est aultre chose sinon une forme de parler, qui demeure encore après que l'homme a parlé, et quasi une image ou plustost la vie des parolles.<sup>1</sup>

A similar definition appears in a much later work, by the female writer Madeleine des Roches, where the act of writing is depicted as 'la voix fuyante arrêtée par la plume sur le papier'.<sup>2</sup> In line with such an association, I intend to focus, throughout my thesis, on literature as a kind of 'speech genre'. As a starting point, I have based this section on some of the arguments of the essay entitled 'The Problem of Speech Genres' by the Russian critic and theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>3</sup> Refusing to recognize any fundamental distinction between speech and writing, Bakhtin divides all utterances (oral and written) into two distinct genres: the primary (simple) and the secondary (complex). Secondary genres may be defined as arising in instances of complex and comparatively highly developed cultural communication, whereas primary genres exist in everyday communication, such as basic dialogue. During the process of creation, a secondary genre, dependent on simple forms of utterance, absorbs and reshapes various primary genres. The passage from one genre to another ensures that the primary genre will assume a new, altered appearance, losing its immediate relation to its initial reality.<sup>4</sup> Throughout my thesis, I propose to study examples of the secondary genre, treating literary texts as samples of speech. I wish to highlight, in particular, the different ways in which, as writers, women and men 'speak'. In my first chapter, I will be looking at a number of etiquette books, composed in order to provide behavioural models for each of the sexes. One of the most important aspects of such works will be seen to be the discussion of appropriate forms of female and male speech. It will quickly become apparent that, in the sixteenth century, men were accorded a far greater degree of freedom than their female contemporaries. Indeed, not only do the writers of etiquette books strive to restrict female speech by imposing limiting conditions on its use, but also actually attempt to silence it all together. A comparative study of literary texts, written by men and women, brings to light the fact that these precepts for speech also exert influence on the field of writing. Thus, a sixteenth-century woman writer who 'speaks' by writing is, quite literally, breaking the rules

by refusing to remain silent. During the course of my thesis, the theme of speech will also be studied in a slightly different manner. Selecting examples of primary genres, such as passages of dialogue, contained within the complex utterance as a whole, I will be focusing on perceptions of women's speech in texts by both female and male writers.

Nineteenth-century linguistics (see, especially, the works of Wilhelm von Humboldt) tends to place the communicative function of speech in the background, seeing speech as being based chiefly on man's need to express himself. Bakhtin challenges this viewpoint, believing the communicative function of language to be underestimated in theories which deny the speaker any necessary relation to other participants in speech communion. Instead, for Bakhtin, the process of speech communication is a highly complex and multifaceted one in which the listener must be considered as playing an essential, active role:

The speaker himself is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding. He does not expect passive understanding that, so to speak, only duplicates his own idea in someone else's mind. Rather, he expects response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth.<sup>5</sup>

No speech stands as completely separate, for each utterance presupposes the existence of preceding utterances and anticipates the creation, as response to itself, of new utterances:

Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances.<sup>6</sup>

We may, therefore, go as far as saying that the specific nature of every utterance may be based on the speaker's anticipation of the addressee's reaction:

When speaking, I always take into account the apperceptive background of the addressee's perception of my speech: the extent to which he is familiar with the situation, whether he has special knowledge of the given cultural area of communication, his views and convictions, his prejudices (from my viewpoint), his sympathies and antipathies - because all this will determine his active responsive understanding of my utterance. These considerations also determine my choice of a genre for my utterance, my choice of compositional devices, and, finally, my choice of language vehicles, that is, the *style* of my utterance.<sup>7</sup>

Bakhtin's dialogic concept of language may equally be applied to literature itself; the speaker being identified with the writer and the listener with the reader. By concentrating on the interactional dimension of literary texts, I hope to produce an unusual insight into the differences between male and female writing. The notion of literature as a form of conversation has significant implications for the female writer. Modern studies of speech

communion between men and women indicate that, as the less powerful group of speakers, women are often assigned the secondary role of 'keeping the conversation going'. Taped mixed-sex conversations reveal that in many cases, the dominant characteristic of women's speech is their use of encouraging expressions such as 'really?', 'do go on', 'and then?' etc.<sup>8</sup> Supportive, eliciting questions of this kind are rarely employed by men, suggesting that encouraging women to speak is of little importance to them. Women who wish to participate in the chain of speech must, therefore, be courageous or bold. Such women find themselves in the position of speaking/writing, without encouragement, in a male-dominated discourse. This would certainly seem to have been the case as regards the sixteenth-century literary scene. In Chapter 2, I will be presenting several examples of male 'conversations', held by speakers/writers such as the *blasonneurs* or the contributors to the *Querelle des Femmes*. It will be seen that little or no place is accorded to the female voice in dialogue of this nature. In Part 2 of my thesis, I will also be looking at the ways in which this exclusion from conversation affects women's writing in general; their isolated position as speakers being directly responsible for characteristics of the feminine text such as the frequent use of internal monologue.

Language may be described as a social form ('speech is socially situated action'<sup>9</sup>), being one of many manifestations of the differences between various social groups. The establishment of a separate language for each of the sexes indicates an attempt, by men, to distinguish themselves as the dominant group of speakers. Consequently, it is no great surprise to discover that linguistic discrepancies, similar in character to those found between male and female speakers, may be detected in conversations between a child and an adult, or a black and a white speaker. Differences in speech may, thus, be attributed less to gender itself than to the position of the speaker in the overall power hierarchy. Many recent studies have examined differences between male and female speech, underlining specific characteristics of female speech such as lexical disparity, empty feminine adjectives, tag questions, hedging (i.e. use of 'well'), hypercorrect grammar, polite forms, euphemisms, a lack of jokes, and so forth.<sup>10</sup> The idea of a separate language for women and men is not new. In many sixteenth-century texts, we find discussion of this subject; the emphasis always being on the desirability of retaining such differences as distinguishing marks between the two sexes. This is the case in the third book of the *Courtisan*, where language is defined as one of the most important means of establishing sexual difference:

Mais du tout me semble qu'en ses façons, manieres, parolles,  
gestes et portemens, la femme doibt estre fort differente de  
l'homme (f.vi ro).

Likewise, the discussion at the end of the 52nd tale of Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* also illustrates that the theme of gendered speech was as much an issue in the sixteenth century as it is now:

'Je vous prie, dit Hircan, dites-moi quelles paroles sont, que vous savez si ordes qu'elles font mal au cœur et à l'âme d'une honnête femme.' - 'Il serait bon, dit Oisille, que je vous disse ce que je ne conseille à nulle femme de dire!' - 'Par ce mot-là, dit Saffredent, j'entends bien quels termes ce sont, dont les femmes qui se veulent faire réputer sages n'usent point communément'.<sup>11</sup>

The implication in all discussion of women's speech is not only that it is different from male speech, but also, of course, that it is decidedly inferior.

The majority of sixteenth-century women writers who seek to participate in the chain of speech are unduly apologetic for their utterances, being aware that they are speaking out of turn. No doubt feeling ill at ease in mixed-sex conversations, women tend to engage in specifically all-female dialogues. Moreover, as will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5, women are generally careful to speak, not only to an all-female audience, but also to a limited group of listeners, or even to just one particular listener in whom the writer has confidence. Bakhtin discusses how in familiar and intimate speech genres, deep confidence in an addressee provokes a narrowing of the distance between speaker and listener/reader, sometimes as extreme as a desire for the two to merge.<sup>12</sup> In such a situation, the speaker is likely to reveal a more personal or confessional style, often detected by the use of the first person. In literature, the idea of writing for an addressee is, to a certain extent, confused by the presence of literary conventions which dictate fixed modes of address. I hope to show, in Part Two of my thesis, that the somewhat 'anti-rhetorical' nature of women's writing provides a partial safeguard against this false rapport between writer and reader. Many women writers seem to have a particular ability to accommodate their speech style, depending on who their addressee is. Movement towards the speech of a specific addressee seems to be provoked by the desire to elicit approval. The different means of speech accommodation have been referred to by the terms convergence and divergence (sometimes also called attenuation or accentuation).<sup>13</sup> Convergence denotes a shift towards the perceived speech style of the addressee, whereas divergence describes a shift away from the receiver's style. My study of sixteenth-century feminine texts, in Chapters 4 and 5, certainly brings to light the frequent use by women writers of this technique of convergence in order to gain male approbation. Examples of women writers striving to adopt what they perceive as a masculine style will be found in Book Two of Hélienne de Crenne's *Les Angoisses douloureuses, comptes* 6 and 7 of Jeanne Flore's *Comptes Amoureux* and, most notably, in Marie Dentièrre's *La Guerre et*

*deslivrance*. One of the most salient characteristics of the sixteenth-century feminine text is its frequently over-erudite style which seems to result from an attempt to match the speech style of the male listener/reader. Recent studies on language and gender in contemporary society have noted that women are expected to adjust to men's speech style far more often than the reverse.<sup>14</sup> This would seem to be true as regards sixteenth-century male writers who may scarcely be said to be sensitive to making shifts in their speech style. Viewing speech communion as an essentially masculine pursuit, the sixteenth-century male writer has a tendency to ignore, or conveniently forget, the female reader whose presence has often been invoked in a preface or dedication at the beginning of the text. Such is the case with Guillaume de La Perrière's *Le Theatre des bons engins*, dedicated to Marguerite de Navarre. Even books written specifically for the edification of women alone, such as the etiquette book, often forget the female reader and slip into a different mode, suddenly addressing a male audience. Here, of course, is a clear illustration of the technique of divergence. Present and yet also absent from the literary conversation, woman is frequently used by the male speaker/writer as a silent audience; a passive listener whose presence is only required in order to accord appreciation of male rhetoric. Indeed, it is in this very role that woman will be observed throughout the first part of my thesis which deals, above all, with works by male writers. In the final section of Chapter 3, as a link to the second part of my thesis, I will be examining Marguerite de Navarre's vision of a situation where men are no longer the dominant group in speech communion. It will be seen that equal freedom of speech between the sexes may come about only when normal social conventions are suspended. However, as will become apparent, the notion of gender still remains of utmost importance in dictating the nature of the speech of both the male and the female speakers in the *Heptaméron*.

In most of the first part of my thesis, I will be examining the various images and stereotypes of the female sex which feature in works by sixteenth-century male writers. It will be seen that, in the majority of such texts, women are depicted solely in terms of their relation to men. Indeed, male writers rarely present women as having any form of inner-life; in other words, female characters are frequently psychologically inauthentic. Translated into existential terms, such representations may be described as the Other, stereotypical identities, which we can define as being 'en-soi'. Viewed in this way, authentic representations in possession of a critical, thinking self become termed as being 'pour-soi'.<sup>15</sup> According to J. Donovan, women are frequently used by the male writer as part of a 'total aesthetic vision', reduced to the same level of importance as the decor itself.<sup>16</sup> An illustration of this notion may be found in Chapter 2 of my thesis, where I show how woman is frequently reified, transformed into an art object and moulded by the male writer-cum-artisan. My study of the *Blasons Anatomiques* in Section 2 of Chapter 2 focuses more specifically on woman as an

object of male desire. The violent and often overtly sadistic character of such writing permits us to speak of a form of 'textual harrassment' in which woman becomes a silent victim of male aggression.<sup>17</sup> In Section 1 of this same chapter, woman will also be presented as the passive object of a popular debate in which the participators are exclusively male. Throughout Part One of my thesis, it will be seen that female stereotypes fall into two categories; the figure of the good, chaste woman and that of the evil, lustful woman. This dualism is, of course, not unique to the sixteenth century, but may be said to pervade all of the Western literary tradition, beginning with the archetypal figures of Mary and Eve.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, we will see that sixteenth-century male writers repeatedly present the good woman image as an appropriate role model for the female reader, advising her to emulate such an ideal. In this manner, men take advantage of their authoritative role as writers, carefully manipulating their female readers in the hope of instilling such ideas into their minds. In contrast, at the other pole of the dualistic world-view, we find the stereotype of the bad woman, the personification of the male writer's worst fears, usually emerging in the form of the domineering, gossipy wife. Stereotypes of this kind will form the theme of much of my third chapter which examines examples from the popular marriage satires.

Texts written by men tend to construct the reader's experience from a male angle and, as a consequence, it becomes possible for women to identify with this male perspective, which portrays her as the Other. Judith Fetterly, talking about the woman reader and American fiction, underlines the contradictory nature of such an identification:

In such fictions the female reader is co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself.<sup>19</sup>

A woman is, thus, capable of reading like a man and perceiving herself as a kind of male artefact. Most feminist critics, recognizing the manipulation of the woman reader, stress the necessity for rereading texts in order to unveil exploitative stereotypes of women. They urge woman to learn to read as a woman, and to become:

a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us.<sup>20</sup>

The process of learning to read 'between the lines', advocated by feminist critics will be well-illustrated by Christine de Pizan's own account of reading in her *Cité des Dames* (see Chapter 2, Section 1). Seen in this light, the examination of images of women in literature becomes an implicitly moral and political act, demanding change by revealing many literary texts to be highly sexist. A study of images of men constructed by women writers (as may be observed in Hélienne de Crenne's work) would probably reveal that men tend to be

represented equally as the Other, lacking an authentic inner-life. However, as K.K. Ruthven suggests, the difference with such studies lies in the fact that an 'images of women' approach highlights, in particular, what is offensive and exploitative in the representation of woman as Other.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in a patriarchal society, male perceptions dominate to the point where women not only read as men, but are also capable of writing as men, and therefore envisaging themselves as 'en-soi'. A revealing illustration of the need experienced by women to conform to the image that men require of them, occurs in the tenth story of the *Heptaméron*, when Amadour asks Floride:

'Madame, quelle contenance me faites-vous?' - 'Telle que je pense que vous la voulez,' répondit Floride (*Heptaméron*, p.105).

Part two of my thesis will reveal that Floride's deliberate denial of her own feminine selfhood is far from the only example of a female character who has been taught to present an image of herself which may be pleasing to the eye of a male beholder. It is perhaps appropriate, at this point, to move straight into a detailed examination of these images of womanhood which appear in the texts of so many sixteenth-century male writers.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE GENDERING OF ROLE MODELS

#### 1. Images of the Renaissance Woman

##### Woman and Medicine

The purpose of this chapter is to study and compare the images of women and men appearing in the sixteenth-century etiquette book. However, before beginning a detailed examination of the group of etiquette books composed specifically for the female sex, it is perhaps useful, first of all, to mention some of the major fields of influence exerted on this particular literary genre. The fundamental ideas underlying the etiquette book are based on certain premises derived from disciplines as varied as Theology, Medicine, Law and Ethics. In his book, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, Ian Maclean declares that debate about women often seeks validity by interdisciplinary reference; opinions being transmitted from one field of thought to another in the form of commonplaces.<sup>1</sup> A stock of such ideas would have been readily available in commonplace books, used as popular sources of reference in the sixteenth century. Considering that the majority of commonplace books tend to view women rather unfavourably, it is hardly surprising that belief in female inferiority is perpetuated from one discipline to another. For an illustration of this trend of cross-referencing, we need look no further than Tiraqueau's well-known legal treatise entitled *De Legibus Connubialibus* (Paris, 1513), which, when speaking of women, frequently has recourse to theological or medical commonplaces. The perpetuation of a particular notion of woman through texts of a serious and authoritative character means that the feminine image remains largely unchallenged and is protected from any substantial change throughout the Renaissance period.<sup>2</sup>

Maclean points to the continuing reliance in the sixteenth century on the set of opposites attributed by Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics*, to the Pythagoreans:

From the earliest times, and in the most far-flung cultures, the notion of female has in some sense been opposed to that of male, and aligned with other opposites.<sup>3</sup>

Without any rational reasoning, such opposites align male with positive notions, while placing female with more negative ones, e.g. male/female; light/darkness; good/evil. This fundamental duality permeates all fields and is, in fact, still deep-rooted in present-day



structures of thought. No discipline seems to have been more influenced by this dualistic world-view than the medical domain, which, in turn, provides one of the most important sources on which the sixteenth-century etiquette book draws. In medical treatises, the female is perceived as passive or in some way deprived. This notion arises, principally, from the view that the dominant humours possessed by women are cold and moist, in contrast with the hotter, drier humours of the more perfect male. Basing their theories on this central belief in the coldness of women, sixteenth-century doctors find justification for claiming the physiological inferiority of the female sex. According to the physiologists, woman's lower temperature may explain all the general functioning of the female anatomy. Menstruation, for instance, was thought to be related to a woman's inability, on account of her cold metabolism, to use up excess blood. This subject frequently becomes a theme of satire, where male writers, safe in the knowledge that they are only echoing current medical opinion, may freely express their disdain for the bodily functions of the female sex:

Mauldictes sont les femmes dadvantaige  
Car vrayement despuys que sont en eage  
De moys en moys ont une maladie...  
Leurs yeulx en enflent et visaiges pallissent  
Arbres en sechent et en meurent les herbes.<sup>4</sup>

Even the shape of the female physique tends to be attributed to coldness; wide hips and narrow shoulders being the result of humours which are not hot enough to drive fat deposits to the top of the body. The cold, moist humours are also held responsible for negative character traits associated with women, such as deceit, fickleness, lack of stamina or even infidelity. It would seem that the female is at a disadvantage from the very start, for she is, supposedly, much slower to develop in the womb than the male. Less active than the hot male, the female baby was said to cause the mother more pain at birth and to be born from the inauspicious left-hand side of the uterus. The uterus itself was, in fact, a common subject of debate in the Renaissance. There seems to have been much doubt concerning the true nature of this female organ. It was believed to be mobile or even an actual animal, travelling around the body under the influence of both the moon and the woman's own imagination.<sup>5</sup> Psychological disorders, unique to women, were often attributed to the uterus. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the word hysteria originates from the Greek 'hustera' meaning a womb. Verbosity and excessive sexual desire, two favourite subjects of misogyny, were also believed to be caused by the influence of the womb. Throughout medical treatises, woman is discussed as the opposite and inferior to man. The notion of woman as no more than an imperfect male is well-illustrated by the belief that the female genitals were the exact inverse of male ones:

Ainsi que tiennent les Anatomistes la matrice de la femme n'est que la bourse et verge renversée de l'homme.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, heat being synonymous with perfection, sixteenth-century doctors are able to justify their attribution of virtues such as courage, stability and moral strength to the male sex. Where all the physical characteristics of the female anatomy are accorded unfavourable implications, the opposite may be said of the perfectly developed male anatomy. As will be seen later in this chapter, the medical notion of the male and the female has significant implications for the assignment of roles and behaviour for each of the sexes; belief in the physical inferiority of women providing one of the most persuasive arguments for her confinement to a private life within the household:

Woman is considered to be inferior to man in that the psychological effects of her cold and moist humours throw doubt on her control of her emotions and her rationality; furthermore, her less robust physique predisposes her, it is thought, to a more protected and less prominent rôle in the household and in society. Although apparently not bound by the authority of the divine institution of matrimony, doctors nonetheless produce a 'natural' justification for woman's relegation to the home and exclusion from public office.<sup>7</sup>

Henri Corneille Agrippa's work, *De Nobilitate et Praecellentia Foeminei Sexus* (composed in 1509) stands out from other texts appearing in the sixteenth century on account of its support of woman, not just as man's equal, but as his superior.<sup>8</sup> The work will be discussed again (in Chapter 2, Section 1) for its position in the *Querelle des Femmes*. However, because of its unusual challenge to some of the medical commonplaces discussed above, I feel that it deserves mention at this point. Agrippa declares that women are bathed in divine light which constitutes the direct cause of their beauty and physical superiority. Throughout *De la Noblesse*, woman's divinity is underlined by use of abundant light imagery:

La femme est plus capable de la divine splendeur que l'homme, et plus souvent en est remplie, ce que aussi l'on peut veoir par la purité, et la merveilleuse beaulté d'icelle. Car comme il soit que ceste beaulté n'est autre chose que la splendeur de la face et lumiere divine inserées es choses créées, reluysante par les beaulx corps d'icelles. Certainement icelle splendeur a esleu les femmes plus que les hommes, pour y habiter, et pour les habondamment remplir. Et de ce vient que le corps de la femme est sus tous par regard et par attouchement le plus délicat, la chair est très tendre, la couleur clere et reluysante, la peau blanche, le chief bien aorné (sig. B8 vo-C1 ro).

In direct opposition to this innate female purity, the hotter male is seen as incapable of completely cleansing himself; the water remaining unclean, no matter how frequently he washes himself. Menstruation is no longer associated with malediction but, on the contrary, becomes a source of cleanliness:

Les superfluités aux femmes sont jettées tous les moys par les lieux plus secretz, lesquelles aux hommes continuellement sont jectées hors par la face la plus digne partie du corps humain (sig. C6 vo).

Likewise, rather than proof of imperfection, the position of the female genitals is viewed as a sign of modesty, especially when compared with the shamefully visible male organs. In Agrippa's text, the various functions of the female anatomy are re-evaluated and exalted. Female secretions such as milk or blood are praised for their medicinal qualities. Even speech receives a positive evaluation in *De la Noblesse*, which dismisses the idea that women are unnecessarily garrulous:

Que diray je maintenant de la parole qui est ung don divin, par laquelle nous sommes principalement plus excellens que les autres animaulx.... La femme n'est elle pas plus facunde en parole que l'homme? (sig. D3 ro-vo).

In line with an attempt to promote the image of woman, Agrippa challenges woman's relegation to the household:

Maintenant la liberté donnée aux femmes est interdite par loix iniques et est abolie par usance et coustume contraire et estaincte par nourriture negligente, car incontinent que la femme est née dès son enfance est tenue en oysiveté à la maison, et comme si elle n'estoit pas capable de plus haulte office il ne luy est permis de toucher autre chose que l'aguille et le fil.... Toutes les offices publiques aux loix luy sont interdites (sig. G5 vo-G6 ro).

However, it must be remembered that Agrippa represents a voice alone; his exaltation of the female sex proving to be, by far, the exception rather than the rule. In addition, a degree of caution is perhaps required when reading his enthusiastic eulogy of women. As will be seen in my discussion of the works of the *Querelle des Femmes*, standpoints in the debate on women are dictated, not so much by personal opinion, as by the desire to excel in rhetorical virtuosity.

### **The Etiquette Book**

Ascertaining the exact readership of a particular sixteenth-century book, or group of books, is a difficult task, involving a certain amount of guesswork. However, one area of reading where questions of this kind pose no real problem is that of the etiquette book. Works of this genre fall into two distinctly different categories; those intended for the instruction of women and those intended to guide men. Etiquette books may, thus, be defined

as 'gendered literature', where the gender of the reader being addressed dictates the whole structure and tone of the writing. In the course of this chapter, I will be examining texts from both these categories and highlighting the widely diverging ideals put forward for each of the sexes.

Already fashionable in the Medieval period, the etiquette book seems to have provided a popular market for printed material in France during the first half of the sixteenth century. The existence of large numbers of these works has meant that they have come to be referred to as a genre in their own right, known as courtesy literature.<sup>9</sup> For the purpose of this study, I will be using the term courtesy literature to refer rather loosely to any text concerned with patterns of behaviour for either women or men. The courtesy book is, above all, a didactic work. It is always factual, authoritative and highly serious in intent. Since the prevailing purpose of these texts is to serve as moral instruction, it is hardly surprising to find that aesthetic considerations are pushed into the background and subordinated to the desire for lucidity. It is, no doubt, for this reason that the majority of such works appear in prose rather than verse; any entertainment value being overshadowed by the more important goal of utility.<sup>10</sup> Advice featuring in books of this kind is presented in such a way as to remain unquestioned by the reader who is compelled to listen attentively to the writer's persuasive voice of authority. Courtesy books for women present an ideal which is first and foremost Christian, influenced predominantly by the Bible and the early church fathers. This use of biblical authority provides a further guarantee that the voice of the writer will not be ignored. The principal aim of any etiquette book is to prescribe a model of behaviour for the reader in question, female or male. However, most of these texts are written by male authors whether they are meant to instruct women or men. Thus, the image of woman which comes to light from an examination of courtesy literature must be treated somewhat warily, remembering that it represents a one-sided view of the female sex.

Courtesy books seem to have been intended to serve as guides for everyday behaviour in sixteenth-century society. In fact, the texts written for women actually have very little to offer in the way of practical advice. The picture they paint always shows woman confined to a life in the home; all advice being based on the assumption that a woman would not work outside the household. This portrait seems strangely divorced from reality when compared with the very different picture found in certain judicial documents which reveal that women played an essential role in the economic life of sixteenth-century society. In her article on 'City Women and Religious Change', Natalie Zemon Davis argues that most women played some role in the working life of the city, being involved in jobs such as shop keeping; the textile, leather and provisioning trades; fish and tripe selling; inn and tavern running; midwifery and so forth.<sup>11</sup> Etiquette books make no mention of roles of this kind. Similarly, in spite of the fact that the majority of courtesy books are dedicated to a royal patron and

would, for the most part, have been read by nobility, writers tend to play down or ignore all together the public, political roles of women occupying extremely important social positions. Unlike the books for men which draw a clear distinction between the ruling nobility and the ruled classes, texts for women rarely specify for whom the advice is really intended. In this way, courtesy literature for women becomes gender-, rather than class-related; a single, uniform norm being created for all women. Indeed, the theory of a favoured class is not easily applicable to the female sex, for the general assumption is that women of all ranks are to be obedient and submissive. Writers of etiquette books tend to encourage women to develop virtues such as chastity, modesty, obedience, patience, discretion, humility and piety; all being qualities which may be put into practice in the private sphere of the household. Such advice denies women their social dimension, preventing them from becoming public figures. In contrast, courtesy books for men seek, above all, to create a social being, focusing on external qualities such as manners and speech which will be necessary attributes in the public world. Detached from the active social sphere, the feminine ideal remains static, resisting any major change. Consequently, many of the courtesy books for women are translations or modernizations of Medieval works which were reprinted in the sixteenth century. Treatises translated into the French vernacular at this time came from countries as varied as Italy, Spain, England and Holland. However, foreign provenance appears to have little, if any, influence on the arguments found in these books; the same image of the ideal Renaissance woman reappearing from one text to the next.

### Chastity

Women's courtesy literature seems to have evolved from a tradition of virginity-treatises written specifically for the edification of nuns between the third and the thirteenth centuries. Many of these texts were composed by the early church fathers, including Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine. In such works, the preservation of virginity was seen to represent the only way in which women, transcending their sexuality, may obtain Christian perfection: 'For their espousal of virginity they often won the highest patristic compliment: they were praised for becoming "male" or "virile"'.<sup>12</sup> Thus, advice in these early treatises is centred around the necessity of safeguarding virginity:

If you walk laden with gold, you must beware of a robber. This mortal life is a race. Here we struggle, that elsewhere we may be crowned. Noone walks without anxiety amid serpents and scorpions.<sup>13</sup>

The idea of virginity as something concrete and visible recurs in Renaissance etiquette books, where it is often represented as a jewel, a precious stone or a gift carried by a bride from her father's house:

La Virginité est quelque chose de bien délicat; elle est semblable à une rose blanche qui perd quelque chose de sa beauté par le moindre souffle des zephirs. Souffrez donc, peres et meres, souffrez que vos filles apportent leur virginité toute entiere à leurs maris. C'est ainsi que la réputation d'une fille en sera plus pure.<sup>14</sup>

As a means of encouraging nuns to remain virgins, the early virginity-treatises frequently draw attention to the burden of bearing and rearing children:

Thy ruddy face shall turn lean, and grow green as grass. Thine eyes shall be dusky and underneath grow pale; and by the giddiness of thy brain thy head shall ache sorely.<sup>15</sup>

This same theme may be traced in one or two sixteenth-century texts. Jean Bouchet, for example, in his *epistre* 'A toutes devotes Religieuses cloistrieries' calls the nuns to reflect on how arduous the life of a mother can be. If her children are well-mannered, she will live in fear of them falling ill or dying, whereas if they are mischievous, they will also cause her much sorrow. Bouchet sets virginity as the most important of the three religious vows and insistently repeats the words 'vierge', 'virginale' and 'virginité' with an almost aggressive force. He reminds the nun that she will have no grief from *her* husband for:

Impossible est d'avoir espoux meilleur  
Que le vostre est Jesus nostre Sauveur.<sup>16</sup>

It is something of a surprise to discover similar views in Vives' pro-marital work, the *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*:

Veulx tu estre mere, pour remplir le monde, comme si sans toy  
il deust finir?<sup>17</sup>

However, Vives' main intention, here, seems to have been to console women who were unable to have children rather than discourage those who could.

The works of the early church fathers provide the foundation for the model of behaviour of the Renaissance woman. By the sixteenth century, the readership of treatises has been extended to embrace a much wider range of women than was originally intended for the virginity-treatises. Nevertheless, the tone of the writing remains basically the same. Although virginity is no longer advocated as an essential prerequisite for woman, sexual mores are still the chief concern of most etiquette books. In fact, all the virtues recommended

to the woman reader seem to be subordinate to the one predominantly superior virtue of chastity:

Ostez de la femme Beaulté, Richesse, Eloquence, Sçavoir, Aliance: retenez Chasteté, tout va bien (*Institution de la femme*, p.33).

Aux hommes sont necessaires plusieurs vertus, Prudence, Eloquence, Memoire, Justice, Force, Liberalité, Magnanimité, Art pour vivre, Astuce a gouverner le bien public... mais à la femme riens n'y est désiré ou necessaire que pudicité (*Institution de la femme*, p.32).

The notion of chastity, signifying purity of both acts and thoughts, appears to have encompassed much more than restrained sexuality. Indeed, the whole code of general behaviour for the Renaissance woman is dictated by the single, all-important virtue of chastity. Throughout this section, I hope to underline the idea that the formulation of every precept appearing in the courtesy book has been influenced by the extreme importance placed, by male writers, on female chastity. A quotation from *De Cultu Feminarum*, a work by the third-century church father Tertullian, indicates this overwhelming influence of chastity as a basis for the ordering and control of the female behavioural model:

La chasteté chrétienne ne se contente pas d'être, elle veut encore paraître. Sa plénitude doit être telle qu'elle déborde de l'âme jusque sur la toilette et jaillisse de la conscience jusqu'à l'extérieur en sorte qu'elle se voie équipé, si j'ose dire, au dehors également, des armes propres à préserver à jamais sa foi.<sup>18</sup>

Advice from the church fathers forbidding ornaments, jewels, makeup and elaborate dress is perpetuated in Renaissance treatises. A woman who seeks to embellish her appearance is to be condemned, for such behaviour is indicative of a lascivious nature. Tertullian even goes as far as declaring that women who are naturally beautiful should strive to conceal their charm:

Puisque donc l'empressement pour des attraites pleins de dangers met en cause à la fois notre sort et celui des autres, sachez que vous êtes désormais tenues non seulement de repousser loin de vous les artifices calculés qui rehaussent la beauté, mais encore de faire oublier en le dissimulant et en le négligeant votre charme naturel, comme également préjudiciable aux yeux qui le reçoivent (Tertullian, pp.101-103).

Writers enforce their condemnation of superfluous decoration by underlining its Christian significance, for to tamper with creation is to insult the creator himself. This idea is illustrated by Vives who points out that a good painter would be rightfully indignant if

someone attempted to touch up one of his completed paintings. Views of this kind contrast sharply with the attitude of the *blasonneurs* (see Chapter 2, Section 2) who unscrupulously mould, paint and sculpt the limbs of woman to create their own female art object of perfect beauty.

In Section 2 of this chapter, it will be seen that writers of courtesy literature hold an entirely different conception of behaviour for men, as far as chastity is concerned. Ruth Kelso highlights this double sexual standard by pointing out the relation between honour and chastity in the sixteenth century:

The supreme importance of chastity to a woman was most clearly shown in its linking with honor. In women honor and chastity were exchangeable terms. Honor for both men and women was something external, a good name, for men a reputation for excellency in many things, for women only in one thing, chastity.<sup>19</sup>

### Silence

From many texts, we learn that the sixteenth-century woman frequently wore a mask, known as a 'touret de nez', to cover the lower part of her face.<sup>20</sup> This mask appears to have served principally to hide a woman's involuntary smiles or laughter provoked by a man's conversation:

Combien de fois ont elles mis leur touret de nez pour rire en liberté autant qu'elles s'étaient courroucées ou feintes! (*Heptaméron*, p.397).

However, as well as hiding laughter, the 'touret de nez' is surely also representative of the desire to gag women, to compel them to keep silence. The notion of gagging seems to recall another device for restraining women, that is, the chastity belt (although there is some doubt as to the latter's actual use). The comparison is far from gratuitous, for the attempt by men to curb female utterances is certainly synonymous with their control over female chastity. All courtesy books underline silence as being the chief quality necessary for a chaste woman to possess. Just as avoidance of cosmetics or immodest dress represents an external manifestation of a chaste mind, speech too is depicted as a tangible mark of chastity:

L'on ne sauroit trop faire d'attention à un avis si important; car les discours d'une fille sont l'image la plus certaine et le témoin le plus sûr de ce qu'elle a dans l'âme (*Mariage Chrétien*, p.163).

A dichotomy is set up, placing chastity and eloquence at opposite poles:



De grande eloquence elle en a moins affaire que de probité et chasteté (*Institution de la femme*, p.23).

It is, therefore, not surprising to find that the typical wife in marriage satire is both loquacious and lascivious (see Chapter 3, Section 2). This notion is certainly not new. In Western history, the image of the good woman has invariably been the silent one; the roots of the tradition of female silence lying firmly in biblical sources:

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church (I Cor. 14: 33-35).

Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent (I Tim. 2: 11-12).

In order to enforce the rule of silence and give greater credence to their words, writers of the etiquette books often justify the restriction on female speech by referring to a biblical authority:

L'autorité est toujours toute entiere du côté du mari. C'est pour cela que saint Paul ordonne que les femmes gardent silence dans l'Eglise parcequ'elles sont dans un état de dépendance qui ne permet pas d'y parler (*Mariage Chrétien*, p.223).

Erasmus' words bring us back to the idea, already discussed, that it is, above all, woman's position in a subordinate group of the power hierarchy which means that she is dominated in the chain of speech. By means of an anecdote, the fourteenth-century treatise writer, the Chevalier de La Tour-Landry, warns against women who attempt to usurp the place of the dominant male speaker:

Et son seigneur, qui fut yrié, haulça le poing et l'abbati à terre, et oultre la fery du pié au visaige et luy rompit le nez.... Il luy eust mieux valu qu'elle se feust teue et soufferte; car il est raison et droit que le seigneur ait les haultes parolles, et n'est que honneur à la bonne femme de l'escouter et de soy tenir en paix et laisser le hault parler à son seigneur.<sup>21</sup>

The reader of the etiquette book is repeatedly reminded that her own behaviour should be modelled on that of the Virgin Mary, the archetypal silent woman:

Si rumines l'exemple predict de la vierge Marie, trouveras es Evangelistes, peu de parole [sic] par elle dictes.... Elles [sic] a tousiours gardé taciturnité demonstrant que en public n'avoit acoustume de parler. Les vierges la doivent suyvre, et a son exemple avoir peu de parole. Silence est grand aornement à la

femme, en quoy reposent chasteté et prudence (*Institution de la femme*, pp.65-66).

Accordingly, the downfall of Eve is presented as the natural result of unwarranted speech. The Chevalier de La Tour-Landry draws the portrait of a somewhat modern Eve who ignores all the rules of the courtesy books. He highlights the fact that Eve would not have been tempted if she had not moved outside the limits of the female domain, listened to the flattery of the snake, looked at the fruit, touched the fruit, ate it through greed, and deceived her husband; hence becoming the first of the long line of scheming wives. However, Eve's greatest sin seems to have been to speak for herself without her husband's permission:

Ce fut celle qui respondit sans le conseil de son mary, et lui y tint parolle, dont elle fit que folle, et luy en meschey; car la responce ne lui avenoit mie, ains appartenoit à son seigneur à en respondre; car Dieu avoit baillé la garde d'elle et du fruit à son seigneur, et divisé de quel fruit ilz mangeroient. Et pour ce peust avoir respondu que il en parlast à son seigneur, non pas à elle (La Tour-Landry, p.87).

Indeed, woman's speech only becomes permissible when the information to be conveyed is of importance and in these situations she is requested to sacrifice her own voice in favour of her husband's:

On n'empêche pas une femme de parler; on lui défend de crier et de faire trop de bruit. Quand il y a quelque chose d'importance à faire; il est plus convenable qu'elle l'ordonne de la part de son mari, que de la sienne. Car de cette maniere elle parlera avec plus d'autorité; comme font ceux qui emploient un crieur public, qui parle plus haut qu'ils ne feroient eux-mêmes. Elle ne doit pas crier: Je le veux ainsi, je l'ordonne ainsi. Il convient mieux de parler de cette sorte: Votre maître le veut ainsi; je ne voudrois pas que mon mari sût cela (*Mariage Chrétien*, pp.256-57).

The above quotation has extremely important implications for the study of women's writing in the sixteenth century. If we are to view literature as a kind of speech genre, we must accept that Erasmus' recommendations are applicable to the writing of the same period. Hence, women are exhorted to tone down their speech/writing, to speak/write as unobtrusively as possible and to eclipse individual or prominent character traits. In addition, women are told to exchange their own voice for a male (and therefore superior) one, that is to say, to speak/write like a man in order to be heard. It is also interesting to note that permission to speak is only granted when there is something worth saying ('Quand il y a quelque chose d'importance à faire'). An examination of sixteenth-century male attitudes to the female speaker reveals that, in fact, men rarely consider that it is worth listening to

anything women have to say. When women do speak, it is often judged as being gossipy, trivial, or even pure fabrication:

J'ay veu pere donner ung soufflet à son jeune filz, pour ung rapport qu'il luy faisoit du faict domesticque à son retour, quoy que le pere le voulust bien scavoir, affin qu'il ne induyst son enfant à estre rapporteur de nouvelles, comme luy acoustumoient les femmes (*Institution de la femme*, p.14).

D'ung corbeau en font six, d'ung oeuf douze, d'ung gendarme ung cent, d'ung petit chien ung asne, d'ung loup ung elephant.... (*Institution de la femme*, p.67).

A large number of derogatory terms, used exclusively to label women speakers, may be found in sixteenth-century texts, as is illustrated by the following extract from Nicolas Cholière's *Les Après Disnées* (c.1585):

Je veux donc icy livrer le combat au babil des femmes, lesquelles... je ne feray point difficulté de nommer... causeuses, babillardes, langagieres, deviseuses... langardes, parlieres, cajolleuses, caquetardes.<sup>22</sup>

The notion of female speech as gossipy pervades the whole of the literature of the early Renaissance period. Not surprisingly, writers in the *Querelle des Femmes* make much of this theme, using it as a useful weapon with which to gibe at the female sex. Gratien Du Pont shows a particular interest in the subject of women's speech, including in his polemical work a chapter entitled 'Caquet des femmes quant se treuvent ensemble'. Here, Du Pont humorously argues that the reason why women are more talkative than men lies in the substance of their creation, that is to say, bones (see Chapter 2, Section 1). Pushing his argument to ludicrous extremes, the author declares that if you put several bones in a bag and shake them, the effect will be a noisy one. He joyously concludes that this provides a satisfactory explanation for women's loquacity. Du Pont catalogues the various subjects of female gossip, including husbands, pregnancy, poor treatment from the parents-in-law, menstrual pains and so forth. The author even reproduces a typical extract of malicious gossip where women arraign one another:

... une telle est putain  
Je vous assure que cela est trop certain...  
Elle s'adonne à d'hommes plus de dix (Du Pont, f.xvi vo).

The standard by which women's writing is judged seems to be based on very similar criteria. Women as writers are therefore disadvantaged from the beginning, consciously apologetic for utterances which they have been compelled to perceive as inferior in both style and

subject matter. Indeed, in Part 2 of my thesis, repeated apologies and claims of modesty will be seen to be typical characteristics of feminine writing.

Courtesy books frequently underline the desire for women's speech to be private rather than public; the female voice to be heard only within the house. It is no doubt for this reason that women are never encouraged to interact or adhere to groups of any kind. As will be described below, recommended pursuits for women all point to solitary activities which do not require the presence of other people. In contrast, works for sixteenth-century men tend to stress the necessity of participating in forms of group behaviour such as public debate, sports or banquets. Criticism of all-female groups recurs as a theme of satire. Interestingly, groups of women in these satires are always portrayed as talkative, or more specifically, as gossipy. We may therefore conclude that the desire to limit female bonding is part of the overall aim to silence women. Laughter between women is also disapproved of by the writers of the etiquette books. This is hardly surprising if we consider that humour is an effective means of creating a feeling of group solidarity:

Laughter (as the overt expression of humour) produces, simultaneously, a strong fellow feeling among participants and joint aggressiveness against outsiders. Heartily laughing together at the same thing forms a bond, much as enthusiasm for the same ideal does.... Laughter forms a bond and simultaneously draws a line. If you cannot laugh with the others, you feel an outsider.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, through their exclusion from humour, women are isolated and prevented from experiencing the same kind of group identity enjoyed by men. Not only concerned with restraint in speech, courtesy books focus on the mouth itself, calling for closed lips and no unnatural movements such as the biting or gnawing of the tongue or the lips. The dual function of the mouth as a source of speech as well as receiver of food may explain the emphatic recommendations for fasting and absence from banquets, featuring in all courtesy literature:

Doivent pucelles avoir en horreur totalement les banquetz,  
convives superflus et desmesurez (*Institution de la femme*,  
p.37).

The Chevalier de La Tour-Landry, perceiving fasting and virtue as closely related, even goes as far as advising his daughters to abstain from eating for three days a week:

Mes belles filles, jeune est une abstinence et vertu moult  
convenable et qui adoulcist et reffranist la char des mauvaises  
voulentez, et humilie le cuer et empêtre grace vers Dieu, dont  
toutes jeunes femmes, et especiaulment les pucelles et les  
veuves, doivent jeuner (La Tour-Landry, p.21).

The importance of the banquet in the sixteenth century is underlined in Michel Jeanneret's *Des Mets et des Mots* where the combined activities of speech and eating are viewed as part of the refined culture only accessible to the male ruling classes. Jeanneret describes the banquet as a pastime which is conducive to intellectual development:

Depuis toujours, et dans plus d'une culture, le festin consacre une triple alliance. Il unit les hommes aux dieux; il marque leur appartenance au milieu naturel; il renforce les solidarités sociales. L'homme à table réalise ses plus hautes puissances; il atteint à un équilibre et une plénitude suprêmes. A ces constantes, la Renaissance imprime une vigueur nouvelle. L'idéal du repas comme lieu d'une expérience totalisante se charge d'une pertinence singulière.<sup>24</sup>

The exclusion of women from banquets may be explained by the desire to deprive them of their social dimension and to prevent social interdependence or bonding. Access to a public, communal meal would signify movement into a male domain, where speech would become necessary and chastity endangered. The presentation, in courtesy literature, of the banquet as a male prerogative indicates an effort to hinder women's attainment of their completeness and full potential. Moreover, it is warned that exotic food and wine are likely to incite lustful desire.

The extreme importance of silence as a factor in the overall female behavioural role cannot be ignored. By means of the courtesy book, male writers may, with great authority, deny women the right to offer their voice as part of the chain of speech. When studying sixteenth-century women's writing, it is necessary to remember that we are, in fact, examining examples of forbidden speech. We must, therefore, consider any female utterance to represent an act which is courageous, if not consciously defiant.

### **The Household**

The Renaissance household appears to have been organized into a hierarchy based on power. Writers of the courtesy book generally adopt the line of thinking found in Aristotle's *Politics*, that a man must rule his slaves like a tyrant, his children like a king and his wife like a politician. In the hierarchy of the 'domestic state', God is seen on the top level, followed by the husband and then the wife who should be subject to her spouse at all times:

Il ne suffit aymer son mary comme frere germain, parent, ou autre amy: car avec l'amour, crainte, ou reverence doit grande obeysance, et service selon les ordonnances des droictz de nature, qui commandent la femme estre subjecte à l'homme, et luy obeyr (*Institution de la femme*, p.111).

What Vives terms as 'les ordonnances des droictz de nature' points to the continuing belief of the sixteenth century in the inferior physical and mental attributes of the female sex; a view

that is based on the incorrect understanding of the female anatomy which has already been discussed. It has been suggested that the rigid hierarchy found in marriage, where only one head is permissible, expresses the sentiment of an era and society, which was based on monarchical absolutism.<sup>25</sup> Courtesy books repeatedly insist on a division of domestic duties between husband and wife, characterized by an active role for men and a passive one for women:

L'office des hommes est d'apporter et de gagner: celui des femmes garder avec cure et anxiété, ou peine, qu'il n'y ait faute (*Institution de la femme*, p.158).

The division of labour is represented by the actual place in which each partner is assigned to work. A woman's domain is generally defined as being within the household, whereas man's work lies in the outside, public sphere:

Ceux du dehors regardent le mari: et ceux du dedans regardent la femme (*Mariage Chrétien*, p.251).

These distinct roles are prescribed on the basis of difference in physical strength between the sexes. The woman, being more frail and inferior in strength to the male, is thus relegated to a secure life indoors. By concentrating on assigning to them a role which confines and restricts, writers seem to be preventing women from moving into a male domain whose parameters are not nearly so clearly defined as those of the female area of work-space. Courtesy writers seem intent on maintaining woman as a private being, restricting her entry into the public areas. The only place outside the house to which writers grudgingly permit women access seems to be the church; a necessary concession if she is to receive Christian instruction. However, writers point to a strict code of conduct to be followed by a woman once outside the safety of the household:

Après allez vous en ouyr la messe bien devotement: et vous mettez au plus secret lieu que vous pourrez: et votre face tellement tournée que vous ne voyez personne: et aussi qu'on ne vous voye point au visaige.<sup>26</sup>

Division of male and female roles must always be observed. Disregard for accepted social positions is shown to be an insult to nature:

C'est chose ridicule et exécrable, que la dame pervertissant et gastant les loix de nature, prefere sa reputation à celle de celluy qu'elle a prins pour seigneur, et maistre: comme le chevalier qui veult commander à l'empereur: le paysant à son seigneur: la lune au soleil: et le bras à la teste (*Institution de la femme*, p.112).

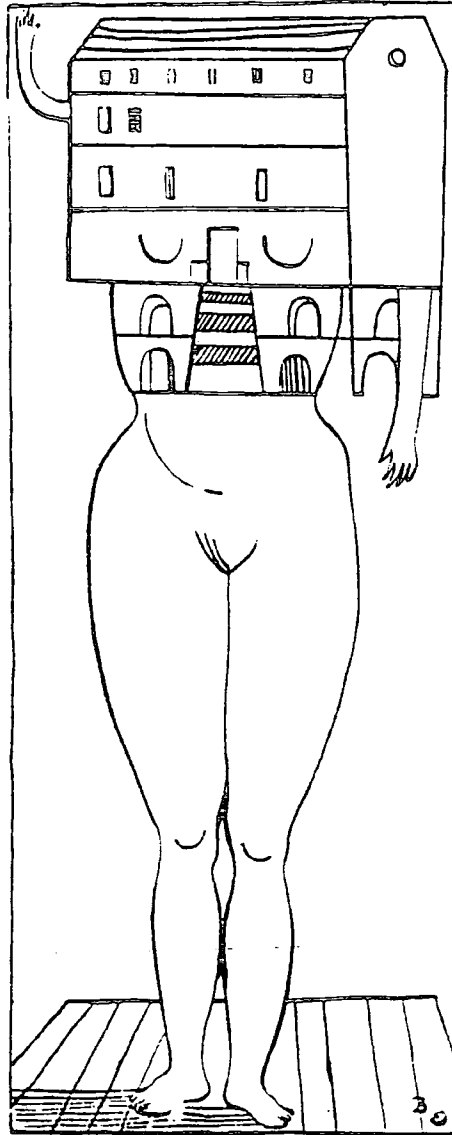


Fig.1 Louise Bourgeois, *Femme-Maison*, c.1946-47.

as well as to the male sex:

Ne permettons qu'une femme soit homme  
Ne homme femme...  
L'homme fera ce qui a luy affiert,  
La femme aussi, nostre estat le requiert.  
Il n'est pas beau qu'une femme commande  
A son mary, l'offense seroit grande  
(Bouchet, *Ep.Mor.7*, f.23 vo).

Anxiety that women might usurp male space no doubt lies behind the silence regarding women's political or economic roles in sixteenth-century society. As Maclean points out, in theory, the economic role played by women is limited to one area alone:

The *mulier economica* is therefore a person of limited actions and power doing 'suitable tasks' (*labores honestae*) and administering the household in her own right, but within the guidelines laid down by her husband: her 'economic rôle'... is limited, private and overshadowed by the male.<sup>27</sup>

The desire to confine women to the house is, of course, also intrinsically bound up with the importance of preserving chastity. A woman who enters the male sphere is much more likely to become unchaste than if she remains within the cloistered safety of a private house. This view pervades all literature, not only the more serious moralistic treatises. Indeed, in the light-hearted anonymous *Monologue fort joyeux*, the author jokingly tries to confirm the natural identification between woman and the house by playing on the etymology of the word *dama*, claiming that it is derived from the Latin term *domus*:

Dames à dextre et à senestre  
On les appelle, c'est raison,  
Car, veu qu'ilz gardent la maison.<sup>28</sup>

In order to demonstrate woman's role as being inside the house, Erasmus chooses to describe Phidias' well-known statue of Venus standing with one foot on a tortoise (an image which is particularly exploited by the emblematisers, see Chapter 2, Section 3):

On sait que cet habile homme avoit voulu marquer que le devoir d'une mere de famille consiste principalement dans deux choses; l'une à se taire et l'autre à avoir une grande attention à tout ce qui se passe dans la maison, et à ne la point quitter. En effet, la tortue ne parle point, et ne sort jamais tout à fait de son écaille qui lui sert de maison; et lorsqu'elle a quelque chose à craindre, elle s'y retire aussitôt toute entière. De même il convient à une femme d'aller et venir par toute sa maison, mais elle n'en doit point sortir; et tous ses soins ne se doivent étendre que sur ce qui se passe dans sa cour, dans sa grange, dans son jardin, et dans tout ce qui compose sa maison; son pouvoir ne doit pas aller plus loin (*Mariage Chrétien*, p.256).



The Italian writer Barbaro underlines the role of the husband as a kind of mediator, who serves as a transitional link, making it possible for a woman to enjoy limited movement between the public and private domains:

Il faut toutefois que les femmes se comportent avec leurs maris tout d'une autre façon que fait la lune avec le soleil; car quand la lune est proche du soleil elle est obscure et invisible, mais quand elle en est éloignée elle est luisante et éclatante: et il faut au contraire que les femmes se fassent voir quand leurs maris sont presens et qu'elles se tiennent cachées dans leurs maisons quand ils sont absens.<sup>29</sup>

Restriction to the legitimate female domain seems to become progressively stricter as a woman moves from child to wife:

Les maryées doivent estre plus rares et tardives à hanter les lieux publics, que les vierges (*Institution de la femme*, p.149).

and also from wife to widow:

Ne cherchera les temples et eglises, esquelles y a frequentation d'hommes et à l'heure commune: mais les chappelles et lieux plus secretz de solitude, esquelz elle pourra, et aura occasion de faire prieres et oraisons à Dieu, non licence, et moyen d'estre veue.... (*Institution de la femme*, p.204).

In this case, the enforcement of the idea of spatial segregation may be related to fear of a woman overreaching her domain with the increase of freedom which accompanies the state of widowhood.

A number of illustrations may be found in sixteenth-century literature of women who are quite literally locked up by their husbands. Hélienne de Crenne in *Les Angoysses douloureuses* describes her imprisonment in her room by a jealous husband:

Mais doresnavant tu n'auras plus de delectable plaisir de sa veue, par ce que je ne veulx que tu sorte de ta chambre ne que regarde à la fenestre.<sup>30</sup>

Later, her prison becomes a more isolated one, cut off from the rest of society:

Incontinent que je fuz arrivée, dedans la plus grosse tour je fuz mise et enfermée, accompagnée seulement de deux damoysselles.... (*Angoysses*, p.89).

Marguerite de Navarre also makes use of the theme of the imprisoned wife in *Conte 32* of the *Heptaméron*. A husband, discovering a wife to be adulterous, kills her lover and punishes the unfaithful wife by locking her up in the very room where the offence took place:

C'est de l'enfermer en ladite chambre où elle se retirait pour prendre ses plus grandes délices, et en la compagnie de celui qu'elle aimait mieux que moi (*Heptaméron*, p.297).

It is no coincidence that the examples cited above are drawn from women writers. In the second part of my thesis, I will be examining the effects of exclusion from the outside, public world on women's writing in general.

### The Body

I have already noted that the female behavioural model may be said to revolve around the central concern for chastity. This is certainly the case as regards the female body. Numerous passages in courtesy literature describe appropriate feminine deportment, recommending, in particular, restriction of bodily movement as an outward sign of chastity. Courtesy books persistently reiterate their advice for women to keep their eyes downcast and to avoid any sudden or abrupt gestures, such as twisting their head or swinging their arms:

A quoy elles satisferont si elles gardent toujours l'égalité en leurs yeux, en leur marcher et en tous les mouvemens de leur corps. Car l'égarement des yeux, le marcher prompt, le changement frequent des mains et des autres parties du corps ne peuvent estre sans quelque indice de legereté (Barbaro, p.104).

Prenez y exemple et vous gardez quelque privaulté où vous soyez, de faire nulles lourdes contenances. Tant de branler ou virer la teste ça-ne-là, comme d'avoir les yeulx agus, legiers, ne espars.<sup>31</sup>

The reduction of bodily movements to a minimum contrasts sharply with the parallel advice for men to participate in physical activities and to learn the gestures appropriate for the delivery of a rhetorical speech. Erasmus declares that organized sport is unnecessary for women who will have enough exercise in the house itself:

Elle fera assez d'exercise pour fortifier la santé du corps, si elle visite souvent tous les endroits de sa maison, tantôt la cuisine, tantôt son appartement (*Mariage Chrétien*, p.106).

All outdoor sports are totally ruled out as unsuitable for the female sex. Not only would they involve venturing into the public domain, but would also necessitate energetic movement and unacceptable exposure of the body. As an alternative, Bouchet offers women the possibility of participating in gentle games which may be played indoors:

Jouans a jeulx qui sont propres aux filles

Comme aux marteaulx, pingres, ou jeux de villes  
(*Ep.Mor.* 10, f.28 ro).

As might be expected, the only activities writers really encourage women to perform are ones which involve little or no movement, such as sewing, cooking, housework or reading. Thus, we see that women are not only confined to a defined area, but that within their own domain, a further restriction is imposed in an attempt to deprive them of all spontaneity and individuality.

#### Female Role models

One of the principal aims of courtesy literature is to draw up models of behaviour which may be imitated by the readers themselves. In courtesy books addressed to a female audience, writers focus solely on models which may be played out within the private sphere of the household. No examples of public roles are ever found in books by male authors. Thus, writers present their female readers with a vision of a world where woman is pictured carrying out only those roles which may best serve the interests of men. Taking advantage of their authoritative voice, writers use the etiquette book as a means of framing their own feminine ideal and shaping their own image of the perfect woman. Indeed, throughout all courtesy literature, woman is defined in terms of marriage, existing as a woman to be married, a woman who is married and a woman who has been married. In this plan, no place is accorded to the woman who wishes to remain unmarried. A woman's alternative to marriage in the sixteenth century was life in a convent. However, in reality, this lifestyle was not so very different from that of a wife; both vocations entailing marriage of some kind, as well as being locked up and confined to an area with clearly defined limits. Considering marriage to be the only possible option for women, writers of courtesy books set up a programme of training which seeks to prepare the woman reader for this specific role. The courtesy book is frequently divided up into sections which deal with the various stages in a woman's life. For instance, in Vives' *Institution de la femme*, we find three distinct parts discussing, in order, appropriate conduct for the *Vierge*, *Maryée* and *Vefve*. The existence of separate sections dealing with each female role might lead us to expect to find a variety of different models. This is not the case. On the contrary, by the time we reach the discussion on the role of the widow, the advice has acquired a remarkably familiar ring to it. A study of courtesy literature quickly reveals that a single model of behaviour is recommended to the female sex; this model being only slightly modified when applied to women of different marital situations. It is, no doubt, for this reason that the typical etiquette book is excessively repetitive. A comprehensive survey of the female roles in courtesy literature has already been

undertaken by Ruth Kelso in her *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*. Therefore, in this following section, my purpose is to do no more than provide a brief outline of them.

Most etiquette books seem to have been composed for young girls and often, more specifically, for the benefit of the author's daughters (see the Chevalier de La Tour-Landry or Anne de Beaujeu). Sections of courtesy books devoted to advising young girls generally propose a suitable programme of instruction which may prepare them for their future position as wife. Not surprisingly, emphasis usually falls on the necessity of behaving in a chaste manner in order to retain a good reputation. Writers tend to vary in their advice on the exact nature of the formal studies a young girl is to pursue; opinion ranging from complete denial of this right, to the granting of a similar education to that received by boys. However, even the most liberal authors, fearing that an educated girl will not be easily subordinated to the will of a husband, draw up strict guidelines for female education, ensuring that it will not serve as a means of increasing the individuality of the female student too much. On the contrary, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2, Section 4, formal study is put forward as a useful aid for instilling the notion of goodness/chastity into a girl's mind:

L'estude des lettres en premier lieu occupe la pensée, puis  
l'eslieve en cognition de chose vertueuse pour revoquer et  
repoulsier les cogitations de turpitude: et se la personne est  
induite ou inclinée à chose vile ou voluptueuse, par bonnes  
lettres elle en est retirée (*Institution de la femme*, p.23).

In all courtesy books, formal study is presented as being secondary in importance to the traditional training in domestic duties. It is only when a young girl has mastered the role of household manager that she may turn her attention to books. Even then, writers often avoid mention of reading by proposing more womanly pastimes such as sewing and spinning. It is commonly agreed that the distaff and spindle are a woman's attributes just as much as arms and letters belong to a man:

Le fuseau et la quenouille sont ordinairement les occupations  
des femmes, et les plus propres pour éviter l'oisiveté (*Mariage  
Chrétien*, p.106).

Taking up this popular theme, Jean Bouchet cleverly turns an ordinary feminine pastime into a means of encouraging Christian devotion as part of everyday life:

Si quenouille a, en regardant le boys  
Qui est tout droit, pense lors en la croix  
Du bon Iesus, et voyant sa fillace  
Pense au saint corps de Iesus sans fallace...  
En regardant le fuseau dont on fille  
Long et agu, d'entendement agile,

Pense aux gros cloux dont fut cloué Jesus.  
(*Ep.Mor.* 6, f.20 ro).

The theme of the distaff and spindle also appears in satire, when a cunning woman will ironically use the instruments symbolic of her subjection as a way of dominating a weak husband:

Elle lui fait porter les enfans jouer, elle les li fait bercier, elle  
lui fait tenir sa fusee quant elle travaille le sabmadi.<sup>32</sup>

Later in the century, a fascinating poem is composed by Catherine des Roches in which she directly confronts the conflicting activities of writing and needlework, representative of the male and the female domains. Her solution is an ironical compromise, where the subject matter of her writing becomes the distaff itself (the poem is entitled 'A Ma Quenoille'):

Mais quenoille m'amie il ne faut pas pourtant  
Que pour vous estimer, et pour vous aimer tant,  
Je délaisse du tout cest' honneste coustume

D'escrire quelque fois, en escrivaint ainsi  
J'escris voz valeurs, quenoille mon souci,  
Ayant dedans la main, le fuzeau, et la plume.  
(*Oeuvres*, p.122)

In Molière's *L'Ecole des Femmes* (written more than a hundred years after most of the etiquette books I have been examining), the character Arnolphe states the characteristics he requires to be present in his future wife:

En un mot qu'elle soit d'une ignorance extrême;  
Et c'est assez pour elle, à vous en bien parler,  
De savoir prier Dieu, m'aimer, coudre et filer.<sup>33</sup>

Although the sixteenth-century treatise writers would not advocate ignorance as a quality to be sought in an ideal wife, formal education has little or no importance in the majority of texts. By the seventeenth century, Arnolphe's views are those of a highly comic character and therefore not to be taken seriously, whereas when the same ideas feature in Renaissance treatises, they are presented in such a manner as to appear unquestionably serious.

Most space in the etiquette book is taken up with discussion of the role of the wife. On account of its importance in early Renaissance thought, I have devoted the whole of my third chapter to examining the representation of the figure of the wife in literature from this period. Advice in the etiquette book centres around the long list of wifely virtues which are necessary for the woman who wishes to please her husband. Most of these have already been touched on earlier in this chapter (chastity, silence, submissiveness, modesty, piety etc.). The

general view seems to have been that just as Eve was created as help-meet for Adam, so too must wives be subjected to their husbands. Marriage is consistently presented as a natural state, instigated by God Himself: 'mariage est la maison de dieu'.<sup>34</sup> Many of the writers of courtesy books convey an image of matrimony as a dignified and saintly institution:

Il semble que la plupart des Chrétiens n'aient pas fait tout l'éclat qu'ils devoient du Mariage.... Je soupçonnerois que cela vient particulièrement de l'estime que les anciens Chrétiens faisoient du célibat et de la Virginité perpetuelle.... De là vient que plusieurs se sont appliquez à donner de grandes louanges à la Virginité, à prescrire aux vierges et aux veuves des regles pour vivre saintement. On n'a pas toujours eu le même soin des personnes mariées, et l'on n'a pas eu la même attention pour la sainteté des mariages (*Mariage Chrétien*, pp.4-5).<sup>35</sup>

The courtesy book informs the reader that marriage is one of the only ways in which true happiness may be discovered: 'une union la plus sainte et la plus heureuse qui puisse être' (*Mariage Chrétien*, p.32). If we remember that the role of the wife is the only vocation open to women, it is perhaps not surprising to find such a positive evaluation of the state of matrimony. The goal of these treatise writers is, of course, to encourage the female reader to enter her expected role as willingly as possible. In courtesy books, marriage is repeatedly referred to as a permanent and indissoluble state: 'tel neud ne peult estre deslié de main humaine, que dieu a ferré' (*Institution de la femme*, p.102). Divorce in the sixteenth century was rare, even in cases when adultery had been committed. Indeed, the sixteenth-century marriage has been described as 'une obligation à laquelle on ne se soustrait pas'.<sup>36</sup> The underlining of marriage as a lifetime bond leads writers to detail instructions concerning the choice of a partner. It is at this point in etiquette books that writers suddenly seem to forget their female audience and begin addressing male readers instead. All advice concerning the choice of a future spouse is directed to men. This sudden switch from the female reader may be explained by the fact that sixteenth-century woman had little or no part in the decision about her future. The choice of a husband is invariably presented as a matter to be decided by the parents alone.

The role of motherhood receives much attention in most etiquette books. In the sections dealing with choice of a wife, writers tend to advise men to seek women, not who are beautiful, but who are physically suited to bearing children. A tall woman is more likely to produce healthy children, whereas a small woman seems more suited to the role of 'courtisane':

car il semble qu'elles soient plus capables de donner du plaisir que d'engendrer de beaux enfans (Barbaro, p.45).

Writers generally place childbirth as the most important goal in marriage, which no doubt explains why the roles of wife and mother are generally dealt with in the same section. Erasmus tends to be particularly positive in his treatment of the subject, envisaging parenthood as a means of uniting the married couple:

L'on ne peut dans cette occasion trop admirer le soin surprenant de la nature; elle dépeint deux personnes dans un même visage et dans un même corps, le mari reconnaît le portrait de sa femme dans ses enfans, et la femme celui de son mari (*Mariage Chrétien*, p. 232).

Adultery is perceived as the greatest possible crime a wife can commit, for it removes a husband's assurance of receiving a true heir:

Femme superbe, pleine de courroux, rixeuse, pompeuse, qui se charge de vin, et de mauvaises moeurs est à toller et supporter: mais l'adultere à repudier (*Institution de la femme*, p.106).

Many treatises deal explicitly with sexual relations between husband and wife. All centre on the idea that the sexual act has only one purpose, that is, the conception of children. A wife should therefore not behave as, or be treated as, a prostitute:

Gardez vous bien de user trop de vos plaisances charnelles avecques vostre femme (Lesnauderie, f.i vo).

Lust is depicted as the cause of numerous physical disorders: harming the eyes, weakening the nerves, disturbing the stomach, speeding up the aging process, or even precipitating death. For this reason, sexual relations, like the consumption of wine, must be undertaken in moderation.

The etiquette book focuses on everything from the behaviour of the pregnant woman to the desirability of breast feeding. By means of an exaggerated anecdote, Vives mentions the common belief that a mother's milk may affect the child's future character:

La fable en est toute notoire, d'ung enfant qui fut nourry d'une truie, lequel de sa nature prenoit plaisir à se coucher en la fange (*Institution de la femme*, p.12).

All writers insist that the breast is only to be used in its biological role, denying any pleasurable associations a woman's body may have:

Dieu ne luy a laict et tetins donnez  
Pour ses plaisirs folz et desordonnez  
Mais pour nourrir son fruit de la mammelle  
(*Ep.Mor.* 8, f.24 ro).

Such an attitude contrasts with the more hedonistic tone of the *Blasons Anatomiques* where, safely in the limits of a fictional world, the breast becomes the symbol for male pleasure (see Chapter 2, Section 2). The mother's role is also to educate her sons until they are seven and her daughters until they leave home. Much space is devoted to this particular duty of the mother. However, it seems strangely contradictory that texts insist on the mother's part in training her children to speak correctly:

It should be the mother therefore that sets her children's habits of speech, taking great care not to use any blunt or rude speech and to insist on proper pronunciation.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, within the confines of the private household, a silent wife may temporarily be transformed into the eloquent pedagogue. However, this role remains a limited one, concerned with politely eliciting speech from others rather than any free expression of the self. In spite of the place accorded to the role of motherhood in the overall image of woman in courtesy literature, women's writing of the same period is mysteriously silent about this particular subject.

Advice to widows contains guidelines for the appropriate manner of mourning. Some moderate expression of sorrow in public is to be expected, for without this, suspicion may be aroused. Lavish, costly funerals are to be avoided, such pomp being distasteful. Widows are recommended to send away their children, for a household without a father risks becoming undisciplined. Much discussion is found, in the courtesy book, regarding the question of remarriage. Generally speaking, writers underline a preference for a woman to remain a widow: 'Bien est meilleur et plus louable se contenir, que de rechief se maryer' (*Institution de la femme*, p.207). A second marriage is presented as highly disadvantageous to the widow's own children, especially if she has more children with her new husband:

Si du second lict tu as enfans, surviendra guerre domesticque, et bataille civile. A peine te sera licite aymer tes premiers enfans, n'y de bon oeil regarder iceulx que tu as engendrez. Il leur fauldra donner viande à cachette... et si tu ne fains avoir en hayne tes premiers enfans, il luy [le second mary] semblera que encores aymeras tu mieulx leur pere, que luy (*Institution de la femme*, p.209).

On the other hand, writers agree that it is better for a woman to remarry than live with the instability of widowhood:

... car lors le basteau est agité des ventz, et l'adolescent est sans conseil: le cheval sans bride, a difficile arrest: ainsi est la femme destituée de stabilité de conseil, et de crainte en viduité (*Institution de la femme*, p.190).



This image of the wild, unbridled horse, which conveys the male fear of the unrestrainable woman, also features in the emblem books to be studied in Chapter 2, Section 3.

Widowhood represents a form of freedom for the sixteenth-century woman; a state where choice becomes available to her. The Renaissance widow could retain control over the estate of her deceased spouse and gained sole responsibility for the upbringing of her children. The fact that laws permitted such female authority seems to demonstrate that the subjection of women in the household is as much power-related as it is gender-related; the hierarchy of the family only allowing one possible head. Interestingly, courtesy literature reveals a very different picture, making scant reference to these new responsibilities. It presents many disadvantages of widowhood and seems to expect an intensification of virtuousness, as if to curb the widow's freedom which must have appeared as something of a challenge to male authority. A widow was, by law, able to encroach on male space and, released from the shadow of her husband's voice, had the possibility of free speech. Indeed, it is surely significant that most of the women writers of the period were in fact widows (e.g. Christine de Pizan, Philiberte de Fleurs, Catherine d'Amboise, Madeleine des Roches etc.).

#### **Female Perspectives**

Before ending my study of the image of woman in courtesy literature, I wish to examine briefly two female voices heard amongst the plethora of male ones. Christine de Pizan, although writing at the beginning of the fifteenth century, was widely read during the Renaissance. She is the first known female author of courtesy books and one of the most important sources for another female writer, Anne de Beaujeu. Diane Bornstein refers to these two writers as 'kindred spirits', discerning in their works a special sympathy for the feelings and interests of women.<sup>38</sup> Advice found in their texts closely resembles the precepts of the male writers. However, while accepting the family hierarchy, both women attempt to redefine in some way the parameters of the female domain. Bornstein discusses Christine de Pizan's praise of chastity as a means of obtaining strength and therefore freedom from the domination of men.<sup>39</sup> She notes how in Christine's work, *L'Avison-Christine*, the author portrays three allegorical figures: the Crowned Dame, Dame Opinion and Dame Philosophy. Each of these ladies symbolizes an ideal, envisaged in terms of female characteristics. Christine places the three ladies on a hierarchical scale, representing gradual freedom from bodily concerns. At the bottom, we observe the wounded, vulnerable body of the Crowned Dame, whereas at the top, Dame Philosophy is represented by a bodiless light. The picture of the Crowned Dame is a pitiful one. As she recounts her woes to Christine, she lifts her robes to reveal her emaciated limbs:

Adonc la tres venerable princesse haulce le pan de sa vesteure  
et a moy descuevre le nu de ses costez disant regarde, lors ma  
veue tournée celle part comme j'avisasse les costez blans et  
tendres par force de presse et de desfoulement noircis et betez  
et par lieux encavez.... Adonc moy toute esmarie considerant le  
nouvel cas piteux et non honnorable que a mere tant  
venerable telz bleceures fussent procurées par ses  
porteures....<sup>40</sup>

Such is the fate of the female body subject to the strains of childbirth and mothering. Bornstein points to a scale of happiness, showing how the less physical these women are, the more serene. In this way, Christine de Pizan seems to be suggesting that freedom and true happiness do not, in fact, lie in the roles of wife and mother. In a similar vein, when answering the question of why women do not remarry, since the trials of widowhood are harsh, Christine simply turns the reader's attention to the nature of marriage for a woman:

Si pouroit a ceste question estre respondu que s'il estoit ainsi  
qu'en la vie de mariage eust tout repos et paix, vrayement seroit  
sens a femme de s'i rebouter, mais parce que on voit tout le  
contraire, le doit moult ressoigner toute femme.<sup>41</sup>

Anne de Beaujeu's work *Enseignements à sa Fille Suzanne de Bourbon*, was written in 1503 for her daughter, who was about to be married to Charles de Bourbon. Suzanne herself had the work published in 1521; no doubt so that other women might share its value. Anne de Beaujeu underlines chastity as the all-important virtue for a woman. However, in her discussion, emphasis tends to fall more on warnings about deceitful men:

Il n'y a si homme de bien tant noble soit qui ne use de trahison,  
ne à qui ce ne semble bon bruyt d'y abuser ou tromper femmes  
de façon, soient de bonne maison ou aultres, ne leur chault  
où.... Parquoy ma fille quelques blandissemens ou grans signes  
d'amour que nul vous puisse monstrier, ne vous y fiez en riens  
(Beaujeu, sig. B1 ro-vo).

Anne de Beaujeu expresses her belief that chastity must be put to the test if it is to gain any worth. She compares hidden virtues with a castle which has never been attacked:

Car suppose que ung chasteau soit de belle et bonne garde, qui  
jamais ne fut assailly, si n'est il pas à louer ne le chevalier de la  
prouesse à recommander, qui oncques ne furent esprovez.... Si  
sont doncques dignes de estre louées les femmes qui en ce  
miserable monde, scavent vivre en purité de conscience et  
chasteté (Beaujeu, sig. E1 ro-vo).

If chastity is to be tested, this necessarily implies that a woman must move out of her traditional domain. For Anne de Beaujeu, this probably meant movement into the world of

the court. Less keen to advocate female silence than their male contemporaries are, Christine de Pizan and Anne de Beaujeu redefine women's speech as both necessary and positive:

Aussi n'est il pas beau à femme de façon estre morne ne trop peu enlangagée. Car... telz femmes... ressemblent à ydolles et ymages painctes, et ne servent en ce monde que d'y faire ombre, nombre, et encombre (Beaujeu, sig. C2 vo).

Douceur et humilité assouagist le prince et la langue mole (c'est a dire la douce parole) flechist et brise sa durté, tout ainsi comme l'eau par sa moisteur et froidure estaint la chaleur du feu (*Trois Vertus*, p.35).

Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre des Trois Vertus* addresses women from *all* social classes, showing sensitivity to differing female experiences and acknowledging women's economic roles in society. Christine de Pizan extends the woman's domain out of the confines of the household and pictures her as less of a private being:

Il n'est pas doute que il apertient a tout baron, se il veult estre honnouréz en son degré, que le moins du temps demoure sus ses manoirs et en son propre lieu, car suivre armes, la court de son prince, et voyagier sont ses offices. Or demoure la dame, sa compaignie, laquelle doit représenter son lieu: quoy que il ait assez baillis, prevosts, receveurs et gouverneurs, il affiert que souveraine soit sur tous... que ses hommes puissent recourir a elle pour tous reffuges apres le seigneur.... (*Trois Vertus*, p.150).

Unlike the majority of courtesy books written by men, *Le Livre des Trois Vertus* is principally a practical guide for women, advising them to be aware of financial and administrative affairs:

Si apertient a chascune de tel estat, se elle veult user de sens, que elle sache combien monte par an et vault communement la revenue de sa terre (*Trois Vertus*, p.152).

Il apertient a tel dame ou damoiselle que elle soit toute aprise es drois des fiefs, des arriers fiefs, des censives, de droictures, de champars.... (*Trois Vertus*, p.153).

Women living on the land are recommended to have some knowledge of ploughing or looking after cattle and sheep. While expanding the parameters of a woman's domain, Christine thus merges the work-space of the two sexes. Aware of the difficulties awaiting a woman who enters male territory, she advises her to have a 'cuer d'omme' or 'courage d'omme'. Christine also shows sympathy with women whose husbands continue to impose the traditional spatial segregation (see *Trois Vertus*, Chapter 21 'Ci devise les excusacions qui affierent aux bonnes princepses qui ne pourroient pour aucunes causes mettre a effet les

choses d'essusdictes'). The only advice she has for wives in such situations is not to rebel against their husbands, but 'obeir pour avoir paix'.

The attraction of both Christine de Pizan and Anne de Beaujeu's works lies in the personal note of their writing which seems to draw on their own experience. In contrast, the male-written courtesy book remains distantly impersonal and theoretical, making any practical application of precepts a difficult task. Many of the writers of these works were themselves married. However, surprisingly, personal anecdote is never a feature of their own texts, which seem quite divorced from the world of real relationships between men and women.

\* \* \*

An examination of courtesy books written by men serves to illustrate that in spite of the voice of authority which pervades such works, they are made up of misconceived images and stereotypes of woman, all of which define her as she relates to man. The makers of these images take advantage of their persuasive voice in order to manipulate and exploit their female audience, presenting to them the most limited selection of models of behaviour. The patterns of behaviour intended to be emulated are, in fact, highly unrepresentative of the roles women were actually playing at the very time these books were written. The image of woman in the courtesy book is, above all, the image of an ideal desired by men. Consequently, it may not be taken at face value. In Part 2 of my thesis, when examining women as writers, rather than as readers, it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that feminine writing is deeply influenced by the structures of thought revealed in this section. I will be studying women's writing as response, and often reaction, to these images of themselves.

Having explored the main precepts constituting courtesy literature for women, I now propose to underline the restrictive nature of these books by comparing them with a selection of the very different texts composed for the benefit of the male reader.

2. Images of the Renaissance Man

In Ruth Kelso's *Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century*, we are reminded that the quest for the perfect man has always fascinated the various ages. For the Greeks, the perfect man was found in the role of the philosopher, whereas for the Romans, the figure of the orator seems to have provided the goal for which to strive.<sup>42</sup> Definition of the male ideal in the Renaissance period is less easy, for it is composed of a collection of composite ideas, not all of which seem readily reconcilable. Sixteenth-century courtesy books for men are specifically intended for male nobility. Accordingly, they seek to define a model of behaviour which should, in every possible way, distinguish the ideal man from the rest of society. Thus, unlike books for women, the male courtesy book is class-, rather than gender-related. Wishing to single out a small group of nobility, the etiquette book stresses, in particular, visible, external factors such as manners or speech. One of the most obvious ways in which the masculine ideal varies from its feminine counterpart is that it permits a more practical application of its precepts. A cursory glimpse at a work such as Erasmus' *Institutio Principis Christiani* (1516) may serve to illustrate this point, for it is divided into sections instructing a prince on matters such as 'The arts of peace'; 'Revenue and taxation'; 'Enacting or amending laws'; 'Magistrates and their duties'; 'Treaties'; 'The business of princes in peacetime', and so forth.<sup>43</sup> Works directed towards men are rarely divided up into sections on the role of husband, father and widower. Consequently, the sixteenth-century man is defined less in terms of his relationship with his wife than as an independent being.

Honour

The masculine ideal, as it appears in sixteenth-century courtesy literature, is a composite one based on Christian virtues, Medieval chivalry and Greek and Roman skills, especially those of oratory. Most writers do no more than pay lip service to Christian virtues before recommending a code of conduct which is predominantly secular and pagan. The word chastity, which features as the keyword in courtesy books for women is significantly absent from the majority of treatises for men. Those which do mention it tend to be works with a particular religious leaning such as the French translation of Jacques Le Grant's (Jacobus Magnus) *Sophologium*, which was composed at the beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>44</sup> It is interesting to observe that as soon as a writer adopts a Christian angle on his subject, the advice for men begins to resemble that found in works for women:

Chasteté fait l'homme semblable aux anges, et faict la vie honneste (*Tresor*, sig. c4 vo).

However, even in a text so specifically male oriented as this one, in the discussion on marriage, the author slips, almost unconsciously, into a lengthy description of wifely chastity (avoidance of make up etc.). It is as if such references were commonplace in any discussion of marriage, even those meant for a male audience. On the whole, the virtue of chastity for men seems to be replaced by emphasis on learning and arms, as is seen in the translation by Jean Lodé of Maffeo Vegio's *De educatione liberorum* (1491):

Quant est de chasteté suppose qu'elle soit à tous sexe moult honneste, toutesfois au sexe féminin est treslouable et nécessaire. Car comme ainsi soit que les hommes par science, et par armes, par principaultez: et autres plusieurs dignitez et platures puissent estre grans et excellens qui proprement ne convient aux femmes par chasteté seule.<sup>45</sup>

As discussed above, the notion of honour in the sixteenth century varies its meaning depending on the sex it is describing. For women, the terms honour and chastity appear to be virtually interchangeable, whereas male honour is more of an external quality, something to be defended in public (a large number of Renaissance treatises deal with the rules of duelling) and often the direct antithesis of chastity:

Celles qui sont vaincues en plaisir ne se doivent plus nommer femmes, mais hommes, desquels la fureur et la concupiscence augmente leur honneur. Car un homme qui se venge de son ennemi et le tue pour un démentir en est estimé plus gentil compagnon; aussi est-il quand il en aime une douzaine avec sa femme. Mais l'honneur des femmes a autre fondement: c'est douceur, patience et chasteté (*Heptaméron*, p.359).

Treatises rarely mention the virtues necessary for the husband to possess. More commonly, works stress the ways in which a husband should maintain a chaste and virtuous wife. In his 'L'Office du Mary', composed as part of the *Institution de la femme*, Vives underlines the husband's position as a kind of leader, serving as a model and example for his wife: 'En toutes... choses l'exemple du mary est souverain' (*Institution de la femme*, p.237).<sup>46</sup> Always conscious of the audience he is addressing, Vives presents the marital relationship in terms with which the male reader could easily identify: 'si le chief s'expose au peril, si faict toute l'armé' (*Institution de la femme*, p.237).

The Body

No restrictions on movement or gesture, of the kind found in texts for women, feature in the male etiquette book. On the contrary, the Renaissance period advocates sport as being one of the most important pursuits of a gentleman. It is interesting to remember the role of outdoor activities in the Classical period when the body was perceived above all as the container of the soul and had therefore to be kept healthy (see Aristotle's 5th book of the *Ethics*). Numerous treatises exist, in the sixteenth century, on the subject of sport, especially on hunting, falconry, jousting, shooting, riding, fishing, hawking, and the 'jeu de paume'. Most sports seem to have served as preparation for war, as well as distinguishing nobility as a separate class (writers frequently mention sports, such as wrestling, which are better suited to the lower classes). The concept of the Medieval knight is still very much alive in the sixteenth century. However, the military element in tournaments seems to become increasingly less significant than the decorative value attached to such pageantry. Diane Bornstein comments on the somewhat ludic spirit of the sixteenth century, describing the manner in which chivalry gradually moves from the realm of business and work, to the realm of social ritual and ceremony or play.<sup>47</sup> In the sixteenth century, chivalry becomes divorced from warfare and is no longer a way of making a living, but a pastime for nobility. The Medieval knight appears to have placed much less emphasis on social graces than the Renaissance gentleman does. This change in the focus of the masculine ideal may parallel the changes in society which were taking place over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As power became centralized with the rise of the French monarchy, the Medieval knight was gradually to lose control of his own domain and move to the court nucleus where life centred on group behaviour rather than that of the individual.<sup>48</sup> This change also highlights the stubbornly static nature of the feminine ideal.

Interest in the arts during the Renaissance period ensures that the masculine ideal will include an aesthetic element, encouraging the gentleman to learn the skills of dancing, writing, music, singing, drawing and so forth. However, most treatises for men (or more specifically for young boys) focus especially on etiquette or courtesy as the prime marker of class. Erasmus' *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium* (1530) is one of the best examples of this particular sort of literature.<sup>49</sup> Like other works in this category, *La Civilité* stresses that it is exclusively for the use of nobility:

C'est chose laide à ceulx à qui Dieu ha faict la grace d'estre bien nayz, ne respondre point en moeurs et honnestetez à leurs parens (sig. D6 ro).

The principal rules which dictate the social behaviour of the Renaissance man are unquestionably modesty and grace. In contrast with advice for women, gesture is given a positive value for the male sex:

Les gestes qui sont adroitcz et bien advenans, rendent ce qui est bien seant de nature, plus decent: et ce qui est vicieux s'ilz ne l'ostent, pour le moins ilz couvrent et diminuent (*Civilité*, sig. A5 ro-vo).

Erasmus carefully considers each part of the male body, outlining a code of good manners. Every precept is based on the underlying idea that a man is a public figure and will therefore be actually looked at by many. The eyebrow, for instance, should not be contracted or arched for this may give the onlooker an impression of fierceness or arrogance. A smooth eyebrow is indicative of an open mind and will therefore inspire confidence in the addressee. Erasmus' work gives advice on a variety of situations, from behaviour in church to the accepted manner of going to bed. As an example of the work's concern with external appearance, I include a quotation from the chapter entitled 'De la table', which advises a man on the correct way to behave at meal times:

Estant assis tien les deux mains sur la table, non point jointes, ne sur ton assiette: car il y ha aucuns qui sottement en tiennent l'une, ou les deux, en leur giron etc. (*Civilité*, sig. B8 vo).

Castiglione's *Courtisan* (as will be discussed below) provides a clear illustration of the masculine concern with show, using the word 'sprezzatura' to describe this paradoxical 'art of concealing art'.<sup>50</sup>

### Eloquence

I come now to what seems to be the most important aspect of the masculine ideal, that is, speech, or more specifically, elegant speech. Advice on speech for men is directly opposed to the firm exhortations to silence which permeate all courtesy books for women. Not only are men encouraged to speak, but they are also urged to speak more than one language. Indeed, evidence seems to suggest that the young male student was advised to read and write Latin, as well as to speak it in everyday conversation. Thus, Latin becomes a male language, a form of discourse in which women (who were normally forbidden to learn the Latin tongue) had no speaking role. Erasmus' dialogue *De recta latini graecique sermonis pronuntiatione dialogus* (1528) underlines the importance of both Latin and Greek, setting out a detailed plan of the correct pronunciation of these languages. The persuasive influence of speech is made evident by Erasmus who declares it to be the most significant



characteristic differentiating man from other animals. With a gift for speech, a man may hold the key to success in the public world:

Another thing that I see clearly is the enormous advantage of a good delivery in whatever it is one is saying. Sometimes two people can be speaking the same language, yet one of them holds the ears of his whole audience like a well-trained singer while the other repels them and bores them with his baying. It does not seem to be just the delivery that is different, but the speech itself, if indeed the word speech can be used at all in the second case.<sup>51</sup>

A passage from Jacopo Sadoletto's *De Liberis* (Lyons, 1533) also underlines the very direct link between eloquence and a successful social life for men:

Mais puisque vous devez vivre dans la société des hommes, avec un grand nombre d'entre eux, qu'il faut qu'il y ait de vous à eux et d'eux à vous communication de goûts, d'intérêts... pour rendre convenable et commode cette vie sociale.... C'est pourquoi souvent je vous exhorte et vous exhorterai à vous livrer principalement à ces études qui font acquérir le noble et bel art de bien dire.<sup>52</sup>

In R.A. Lanham's definition of 'rhetorical man', he notes how the public speaker becomes particularly conscious about the language he uses, premeditating his words and paying attention to the verbal surface of his speech. 'Rhetorical man' is seen as an actor, his reality being a public one:

His motivations must be characteristically ludic, agonistic. He thinks first of winning, of mastering the rules the current game enforces.<sup>53</sup>

In the sixteenth century, the principal 'rule' to be mastered was the concept of grace or 'sprezzatura' which was carried into the sphere of speech. The criticism of speech as being gossipy or trivial is never directed to the male. The polished ease with which men 'speak' will become more evident when compared with the frequently awkward style of women's speaking/writing which attempts to 'underdo or overemphasize everything' (see Intro.2). This preoccupation with eloquent speech appears to have important implications for the male writer. Courtesy books discussing education do not ignore the practice of writing, and frequently link literary composition with oratory, maintaining that literary success has its roots in eloquence. In Chapter 2, I will be examining a number of literary texts composed by men and exploring the notion of the male writer as a predominantly 'rhetorical man'. I believe that the rhetorical, public and often ludic nature of these texts may be traced back to the masculine ideal for education which encourages men to develop their eloquence. It would

also seem to be this freedom of speech which provides men with the social dimension denied to female contemporaries.

Unlike texts for women, courtesy books for men never suggest that education is a mere pastime or that its purpose is simply moral edification. Formal study is presented as a prerogative of a noble boy's upbringing:

S'il est noble nullement ne doit passer sa jeunesse sans science  
apprendre: car noblesse ne peult estre gardée: et ne se trouve  
bien sans science.<sup>54</sup>

A young boy should first, at the age of six or seven, be sent to a tutor who might be a close friend or an elder brother, then into a small class where learning should take place in a 'publique auditoire'. While the education of girls is restricted to the confines of the family home, the education of boys seems to incorporate the true sense of the Latin verb 'educere', literally meaning 'to lead out'. Learning at home is said to retard a boy's education and hinder the progress of his eloquence:

Aussi ne leur convient permettre d'estre trop solitaire doubtant  
qu'il ne leur adviene ce qui est advenu à plusieurs. Lesquels  
devant les hommes se trouvent aussi sauvages et estonnez que  
se ilz veoient choses monstrueuses et incogneuses, et qui  
n'osent parler ne respondre à chose qu'on leur propose ne lever  
la face pour regarder ceulx qui sont en presence et parlent  
avecques eulx (Maffeo Vegio, f.li vo).

The author of *Le Guidon des Parens* describes his own tutor's teaching method as an example of a suitable form of male education. His detailed description highlights the emphasis placed on speech as of central importance to the system of learning. We are told that one pupil would come forward to explain a rule of grammar, which would inspire the rest of the class to debate and challenge the point in question:

Lors venoit celluy qui de soy et de son scavoir vouloit faire  
experience et proposoit icelle partie de grammaire de laquelle  
vouloit parler et estre ouy, puis apres qu'il avoit parlé: jusques  
à souffire, et selon que le temps et espace luy estoit donné.  
Lors commençoient à arguer contre ce qu'il avoit proposé tous  
les predictz assistens. Aux motifz et objections desquels estoit  
tenu de respondre et bailler solutions civiles et probables  
(Maffeo Vegio, ff.lxvi ro-vo).

This method of education encourages boys to interact and participate in social discourse. It is interesting to note the use of personal anecdote by Maffeo Vegio in his discussion of male education. Recourse to this technique was never seen to be a characteristic of texts addressed to women, which seems to imply that the male writer is somewhat more at home when instructing those of his own sex.

An examination of courtesy literature reveals the extent to which Classical rhetoric seems to have influenced Renaissance learning.<sup>55</sup> The formal study of rhetoric was fundamental to Greco-Roman pedagogy and works such as Cicero's *De Inventione* and the later anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium* were repeatedly published at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Indeed, many parallels may be drawn between the educational advice found in Renaissance treatises and the principles of rhetorical theory from the Classical period:

Sur toutes choses est d'equité et bonne congruité ceder et porter honneur à Antiquité: comme à nostre tresreligieuse et sacrée mere (Maffeo Vegio, f.lxxvi ro).

Maffeo Vegio's description of a grammar lesson (quoted above) points to a system which relies on practice as well as theory, as recommended in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: 'Theory without continuous practice in speaking is of little avail'.<sup>56</sup> Following the rules of Classical rhetoric, *Le Guidon* puts forward the technique of imitation as a means of improving one's oratorical talents. It must be remembered that rhetoric was traditionally divided up into five parts: inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria and pronuntiatio. Traces of this structure are still evident in the educational theories of the sixteenth century. The concepts of dispositio and elocutio are particularly present in *Le Guidon*, which promotes clear arrangement of subject matter, an overall plan of composition and careful selection of words and figures:

Aussi les admonesteront que leur oraison soit emendée, et necte, diverse, et figurée, ornée, et plaisante: par beaulx et elegans termes. Mais devant toutes choses (qui est la premiere vertu de eloquence) qu'elle soit plaine et claire tellement qu'elle n'ayt besoing d'aulcun interprete.... Et aussi pareillement garder ordre en toutes choses. Oultre lequel n'est rien plus agreable à l'entendement humain (Ainsi que dît Cicero) pourveu qu'il soit conjoint avecques eloquence (f.lxxiiii vo).

The notion of pronuntiatio also receives much attention in *Le Guidon* paralleling a section on this subject in *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (see pp.201-203). Aspects of delivery such as voice quality, gesture and physical movement are all dealt with as essential ingredients in rendering one's speech more persuasive and plausible:

Parquoy conviendra exercer leur voix et prononciation: Davantage leur fault composer decentement et prudemment les mouvemens de la bouche et semblablement les gestes de toutes les parties du corps (f.lxxix ro).

Thus, speaking becomes a way of using the body; voice and gesture working together to project one's ideas in the most convincing manner possible. We are now, of course, far from

the silent, motionless image of the ideal Renaissance women. Eloquence and public speech are set as the goal for a man to strive for; the desire to succeed in this field providing an incentive for scholarly progress:

La coustume de declamer leur donnera aussi une merveilleuse pointe et ardeur de estudier les lettres, et faire quelque oraison ou harengue en publique. Car d'autant que ilz congnostront avoir plus grant honneur et louenge pour la multitude des assistens, d'autant seront plus aspres d'estudier: et mettront peine de se faire disers et eloquens (Maffeo Vegio, f.lxxviii vo).

Before concluding this section, it is perhaps appropriate to mention the figure of Eudemon, appearing in Rabelais' *Gargantua*, who epitomizes the Renaissance ideal of masculine eloquence. His speech (in Latin, of course) is used to illustrate the success of the new methods of learning and is based firmly on the precepts of Classical rhetoric:

Alors Eudemon, demandant congié de ce faire audict viceroy son maistre, le bonnet au poing, la face ouverte, la bouche vermeille, les yeulx asseurez et le regard assys suz Gargantua avecques modestie juvenile, se tint suz ses pieds, et commença le louer et glorifier premierement de sa vertus et bonnes meurs, secondement de son sçavoir, tiercement de sa noblesse, quartement de sa beaulté corporelle, et pour le quint, doucement l'exhortoyt à reverer son pere... Et le tout feut par ycelluy proferé avecques gestes tant propres, pronunciation tant distincte, voix tant eloquente et language tant aorné et bien latin, que mieulx ressembloyt un Gracchus, un Ciceron ou un Emylius du temps passé qu'un jouvenceau de ce siecle.<sup>57</sup>

By ensuring an eloquent and refined language for themselves, the ruling classes were able to maintain the social stratification which granted them top position in the power hierarchy over both women and the lower classes. In this way, masculine speech may be viewed as having an essentially social and political function.<sup>58</sup>

### *The Courtisan*

Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* probably had the greatest influence throughout Europe of all courtesy literature for male nobility. First printed in 1528, the *Cortegiano* appeared in approximately forty Italian editions before the end of the century. The work was also translated into several European languages, including French, during the course of the sixteenth century. In many ways, the text may be perceived as both a theoretical treatise and a living model to be imitated. The book debates the ideal behaviour of the courtier, presented by a group of courtiers who may be observed actually playing out the conduct suggested by

their own words. From the very beginning of the work, we are alerted to the centrality of language in the *Courtisan*.<sup>59</sup> In Book 1, a debate arises, discussing whether Tuscan or a more universal language should be adopted. Castiglione underlines his notion of language as living and changing, not being divorced from the flow of history. Thus, by implication, the courtier too must move with fashion and be sensitive to social change. The *Courtisan* exemplifies the sixteenth-century male preoccupation with the outward forms of behaviour, and most significantly with language as a marker of class and power. The author informs us at the beginning of the work that the speakers portrayed are now all dead. In this way, the book becomes a memorial to the members of the court of Urbino. The courtiers come alive and take on the dimensions of living characters by means of their voice alone, never through the technique of description. While the author creates the verbal portraits of the courtiers, they themselves are responsible, through their eloquence, for the creation of a hypothetical courtier:

... le conte, et messire Federic, lesquelz avec leur eloquence ont formé ung courtisan (*Courtisan*, Bk 2, f.cxlvi ro).

Instead of being solely theoretical, the *Courtisan* takes on an extra-dimension and is animated by the highly elegant conversations of the courtiers. The concept of 'sprezzatura' appears most obviously in the words of advice of the debating courtiers:

Je treuve une reigle tresuniverselle, qui me semble servir quant à ce point, en toutes les choses humaines que l'on faict, ou que l'on dict plus que nulle aultre, c'est de fuyr le plus que l'on peult comme une tresapre perilleuse roche, l'affectation: et pour dire, peult estre, une parolle neufve, d'user en toutes choses d'une certaine nonchallance, qui cache l'artificiel, et qui monstre ce que l'on faict comme s'il estoit venu sans peine et quasi sans y penser (Bk 1, f.xxxiii ro).

- but also in their own elegant way of speaking. In order to avoid boredom, the courtiers vary the length of their speeches, interrupting each other with jesting comments when the tone becomes too serious. Conversation slips from one subject to another, every transition being a smooth one. Argument and refined debate are provoked by almost every point discussed by the courtiers. Discourse becomes a challenge, a rhetorical game in which every player strives to excel by means of skilful contradiction. The rhetoric of persuasion is seen at work within and outside the confines of the text. Castiglione as author is at pains to persuade his readers to support the courtier and therefore nobility itself, while the courtiers themselves are involved in an intricate game in which each hopes to shine.

The whole of the *Courtisan* is set in the framework of a game. In fact, the game is a double one, for the work begins with a game to choose a game which ends up as the one in

which a perfect courtier will be drawn. The ludic nature of the *Courtisan* may be related back to R.A. Lanham's description of rhetoric as a game, whose participants think first of winning and of mastering the rules. The courtiers of the *Courtisan* are portrayed in the act of a long extended game taking place over several evenings. The group is concerned above all with itself and justification of its position as a privileged group. The placing of the chairs in a circle and the sense of enclosure caused by the fact the conversations all take place within a closed room enforce the idea of play.<sup>60</sup> The courtiers are constantly aware that they must ever be careful to sustain this game as play. The verb 'rire' recurs throughout the text and when it is absent we may be aware that the game is coming 'unstuck':

Laughter is a guarantee of the polish of the conversational surface and when it is silenced for an immoderate time one can detect a tension; one should be alert to the potentially intrusive.<sup>61</sup>

Whenever the conversation errs into a danger zone, the speaker must hastily change the subject:

Il ne reste aulcune nation qu'il n'ait faict butin de nous, tellement qu'il ne reste gueres plus à piller: et toutesfoys l'on ne laisse encore de piller: mais je ne veulx que nous entrons en propos de fascherie, au moyen de quoy souffira dire (quant aux habillements de nostre Courtisan).... (Bk 2, ff.xc vo-xci ro).

The *Courtisan* may thus be regarded as both theory and illustration of the most significant element of the masculine ideal of the Renaissance man. The courtier exemplifies the importance of speech for the noble classes of the sixteenth century in maintaining their position of superiority over the silence of the female sex and lower classes. Indeed, Castiglione's courtiers may be described as incarnating the very image of eloquence.

#### Woman as Audience

The game played in the *Courtisan* is a male one, where each player strives to show off his eloquence. However, the group assembled in the court of Urbino is *not* all male, for at the beginning of the text, Castiglione informs us of the presence of almost as many women as men. In fact, at the head of the court itself is Elisabetta Gonzaga who, in the absence of her invalid husband, Prince Guidobaldo, dictates the events of the evenings described. A certain tension arises from the situation where every courtier is subordinate to a female figure of power. However, the Duchess's position as both woman and leader is quite clearly a contradictory and uncomfortable one for her. Near the beginning of the *Courtisan*, we learn that Elisabetta is only too eager to abandon her political role, by transferring her power of speech onto another person:

... et apres se conduisoient ainsi qu'il plaisoit à madame la Duchesse, qui le plus souvent en laissoit la charge à ma dame Emillie.... À l'heure ma dame la Duchesse dist en soubzriant Affin que chascun vous ayt à obeyr, je vous faictz ma lieutenante, et vous donne mon auctorité (Bk 1, ff.xv ro-vo).

Emilia herself scarcely speaks in the *Courtisan*, in spite of the position of authority she holds. Indeed, both Elisabetta and Emilia seem to exemplify the conflict between power and speech which must surely have been a reality for numerous sixteenth-century women. The other women present in the room have no voice, remaining silent throughout. Their only participation in the game is through their laughter or the occasional burst of gentle annoyance when the conversation strays from the limits of accepted behaviour:

Alors une grande partie de ces dames se leverent, pource que ainsi le faire ma dame la duchesse leur avoir faict signe, et en riant coururent toutes contre le seigneur Gaspard, comme pour le veoir batre (Bk 2, f.cxl ro).

Although practically imperceptible, the female presence remains essential for the game to have any true meaning. Indeed, the women of the court are described as constituting the motivating force behind all the courtier's behaviour:

Nulle court pour grande qu'elle soit peult avoir en soy ornement ou triumphe ne resjouysannce sans femmes: pareillement nul Courtisan peult avoir bonne grace, n'y estre plaisant ou hardy, ne jamais faire exploict excellent en chevalerie, s'il n'est meu et incité par la conversation, amour et plaisir des femmes (Bk 3, f.v ro).

In my introduction, I discussed the notion that the nature of all speech is influenced by the speaker's anticipation of his addressee's reaction. It was suggested that in mixed-sex conversations, women speak much less than men and frequently formulate questions to encourage men to speak. An interesting illustration of this point may be found in the *Courtisan*, where almost every single female utterance is geared to encouraging male conversation:

Dictes au moins (respondit ma dame Emilie) comme elle feit (Bk 1, f.xviii vo).

Ne chiffrez point (dict elle) les femmes des vrayes louenges qui leur sont deues, et vous souvenez que si le seigneur Gaspard, et par adventure le seigneur Octovian vous escoutent avecques ennuy: nous et tous les autres seigneurs qui sont icy vous oyons avecques plaisir. Ce nonobstant le Magnifique vouloit faire fin. Toutesfois les femmes commencerent le prier quil parlast (Bk 1, f.xxvi ro).

The third book of the *Courtisan* creates a 'dame de palais' to rival the perfect courtier. However, this female figure emerges as nothing more than the dim shadow of her male prototype, for if she is granted access to certain skills, it is principally so that she may appreciate the accomplishments of the courtier:

Je dy que je veulx qu'elle ayt congnoissance de ce que les seigneurs qui sont icy ont voulu que sache le courtisan, et quant aux exercices que nous avons dit ne luy convenir point, je veulx qu'elle en ayt aumoins ce jugement que lon peult avoir des choses que l'on ne met point en court: et ce pour scavoir louer les gentilz hommes plus ou moins selon leur merite (Bk 3, f.x ro).

Thus, silently appreciative of the game she may observe, but not play, woman becomes the necessary audience before which men display their wit. In Chapter 2, I will be exploring in some detail the role of woman as reader or audience to a variety of different male 'games'.



## CHAPTER TWO

### WOMAN AS ARTEFACT

#### 1. The *Querelle des Femmes*.

Vituperation of the female sex may be traced back to some of the earliest texts of antiquity. However, in the late Medieval and Renaissance period, works debating the relative merits and evils of women form a corpus of loosely interrelated writings, widely known as the *Querelle des Femmes*. The title of this debate has not been coined posthumously by critics eager to categorize works into convenient subdivisions, but was, in fact, used by a number of the contributors themselves.<sup>1</sup> This acknowledgement by writers of their role in adding a voice to an ongoing group discussion highlights the overridingly rhetorical nature of the debate. Indeed, a common feature of the majority of works in the *Querelle* is that they have come into existence only as a means of answering or contradicting some other text:

Mesdisans, crevez de douleur,  
Oyans la louenge des dames.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, writers frequently conclude their own works by throwing out a challenge which may encourage response from the readers. Seen in terms of speech communication, the *Querelle* may therefore be defined as a chain of speech in which speakers are given equal opportunity to react and respond to each other's words. The interdependence of works participating in the debate on women demonstrates that, for the authors, the act of writing is not a solitary, but a sociable one, drawing them into an overtly public dialogue. This public intent is well illustrated by Matheolus who orders his book to spread the news of his miserable marriage to friends living all over France:

Va t'en, petit livre, va t'en  
En la Cité, plus n'y atten!

Expose leur ma pestilence  
Et leur di sans faire silence  
La grant douleur dont je labeure,  
(Je ne suis a repos nulle heure)  
Afin que, quant ils orront dire,  
Ils ne se puissent escondire  
Ne excuser par ignorance.  
Fay publier par toute France.<sup>3</sup>

Alienated Readers

With few exceptions, the authors of these polemical writings are men. The female writer is alienated from such a discourse, for by its nature the *Querelle* incites speech of an argumentative kind, which would involve contradiction and the voicing of disagreement in public. We have already seen, in Chapter 1, that such speech is firmly discouraged for women. One of the results of limitations of this sort, as will be examined in the second part of my thesis, is that women's writing is particularly private in nature, favouring internal monologue, rather than displaying the characteristics of public debate. The reduction of woman into a single, classless, faceless figure appearing in works on both sides of the polemic must also have contributed to the rejection of this genre by female writers, unable to identify with such a vision of womanhood. It is less easy to judge whether the readership of such works was also predominantly male. What is certain, is that most authors assume their readers to be male and correspondingly establish a kind of fraternity with them which, perforce, excludes the female reader:

Seigneurs, compagnons et amis  
(Matheolus, p.5).

Toy qui lira dedans ce livre,  
Fais que des femmes te delivre.<sup>4</sup>

Woman thus becomes the passive object of the *Querelle* to be debated in the same way that writers eulogized or slandered subjects such as old age or country life. However, there can be no doubt that at least some women read works belonging to the *Querelle*. Many of the texts supporting women are dedicated to royal or noble women; a factor which may partly explain the direction of the writer's allegiances. By praising women in general, the writer seems to have discovered a means of indirectly flattering his own patron. Indeed, Emile Telle underlines the important role played by Anne de Bretagne in encouraging writers to publish works exalting love and respect for women.<sup>5</sup> It is no doubt through her influence, that we find a host of such works coming into print around the beginning of the sixteenth century (texts dedicated to Anne de Bretagne include Jean Marot's *Advocate des Dames*; Book four of Symphorien Champier's *Nef des Dames*; Antoine Dufour's *Les Vies des Femmes Célèbres* and a translation into French of Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*). Also, bearing in mind the fact that most contributions to the *Querelle* were in the vernacular and received widespread and repeated printed editions, it seems safe to conclude that women were amongst the readers of these works. Proof of this comes from Christine de Pizan's *La Cité des Dames*,

composed in 1405. Surprisingly, the text does not seem to have been printed during the sixteenth century. However, the work was certainly well-known, for it is often mentioned by writers of the *Querelle* in lists of books defending the female sex:

Monsieur, à mon cas j'ay pourveu  
Pour repulser toutes ces blasmes.  
Vécý le *Triumphe des Dames*,  
Où maint beau dit est recité:  
Et secondement la *Cité*  
D'elles, noble et vertueuse;  
Le tiers, pour euvre sumptueuse,  
*Le Champion*. Vélà les troys.  
(*Monologue*, pp.188-89).

In the *Cité*, we find a revealing description of the response of a female reader to the portrait of herself as an object of scurrilous debate. While studying in her room, Christine has come across a copy of Matheolus' *Lamentations*. Having skimmed through several pages, she finds the book to be little to her liking, so abandons it for more serious and useful study. However, her brief reading of Matheolus has demoralized her and caused her to question the whole structure of anti-feminist thought:

Mais la lecture de ce livre, quoiqu'il ne fasse aucunement autorité, me plongea dans une rêverie qui me bouleversa au plus profond de mon être. Je me demandais quelles pouvaient être les causes et les raisons qui poussaient tant d'hommes, clercs et autres, à médire des femmes et à vitupérer leur conduite soit en paroles, soit dans leurs traités et leurs écrits. Il n'y va pas seulement d'un ou deux hommes, ni même de ce Mathéole, qui ne saurait prendre rang parmi les savants, car son livre n'est que raillerie; au contraire, aucun texte n'en est entièrement exempt. Philosophes, poètes et moralistes -et la liste en serait bien longue-, tous semblent parler d'une même voix pour conclure que la femme est foncièrement mauvaise et portée au vice.<sup>6</sup>

Christine's description of male authors as all 'speaking with the same voice' highlights the homogeneous nature of the *Querelle* writings. These are most certainly examples of male speech where a strong fellow feeling bonds the authors together in a conversation in which the female voice is both alien and unwelcome (an indication of the importance of speech to the debate is seen by the commonly used names of characters such as 'Bouche maldisant', 'Mal-bouche', 'Langue serpentine', 'Bouche d'or' etc.). The despair and humiliation experienced by a female reader encountering the depiction of herself as an unflattering product of the male imagination is clearly stated in Christine's account: 'me plongea dans une rêverie qui me bouleversa au plus profond de mon être'. Unable to treat writings of the *Querelle* as pure rhetoric, Christine diverts the debate onto a personal focus, where she

compares the reality of her own experience with that of the female figures created by male authors:

Je me mis à réfléchir sur ma conduite, moi qui suis née femme; je pensais aussi aux nombreuses autres femmes que j'ai pu fréquenter, tant princesses et grandes dames que femmes de moyenne et petite condition, qui ont bien voulu me confier leurs pensées secrètes et intimes; je cherchais à déterminer en mon âme et conscience si le témoignage réuni de tant d'hommes illustres pouvait être erroné (*Cité*, p.36).

Examining the number and distinction of male authors who have written such works, Christine begins to doubt her knowledge of the female sex, attempting to ignore her own feelings:

Cette seule raison suffisait à me faire conclure qu'il fallait bien que tout ceci fût vrai, même si mon esprit, dans sa naïveté et son ignorance, ne pouvait se résoudre à reconnaître ces grands défauts que je partageais vraisemblablement avec les autres femmes. Ainsi donc, je me rapportais plus au jugement d'autrui qu'à ce que je sentais et savais dans mon être de femme (*Cité*, pp.36-37).

Christine's belief in the authority of male writing is thus seen to override her own firsthand experience of what it means to be a woman. In this way, Christine (and with her, no doubt, other female readers) is manipulated by the male author into accepting her own inferiority. In texts written by men, the reader's experience is constructed from a male angle which means that women may fall into the trap of reading as men and identifying with this perspective rather than their own. However, in Christine's case, with the aid of Dame Raison, Dame Droiture and Dame Justice, she comes to trust her own experience and resists being seduced by male rhetoric. The three allegorical ladies, serving as her mentors, warn Christine of the devices of rhetoric used by male writers:

Quant aux poètes dont tu parles, ne sais-tu pas que leur langage est souvent figuré, et que l'on doit parfois comprendre tout le contraire du sens littéral? On peut en effet leur appliquer la figure de rhétorique appelée antiphrase, en disant par exemple... qu'un tel est mauvais, laissant entendre qu'il est bon, ou pareillement au contraire (*Cité*, p.39).

The Hall of Mirrors

The words of Christine's mentors point to one of the most complex aspects of the works of the *Querelle*. Embarking on a study of these texts is rather like entering a hall of mirrors where nothing is quite as it first seems. The pieces constituting the *Querelle* are best described as rhetorical exercises, putting into practice the methods recommended by handbooks of rhetoric, commonly used in the education of the sixteenth-century man (see Chapter 1, Section 2). Since most authors' first concern was to parade their wit and ingenious use of examples from every possible source (including a haphazard selection from Classical mythology, the Bible and history), it seems almost impossible to deduce what was really felt about women. As discussed in the last chapter, in rhetorical debate, the orator becomes an actor, focusing his attention only onto the verbal surface of his speech, rather than onto the sincerity of his words. Moreover, his listeners would scarcely be likely to assess the quality of the speaker for the degree of truth spoken. In Chapter 1, I discussed the difference in education between the male and female pupils. Men were seen to be encouraged to interact and participate in social discourse, unlike women who were conceded little more than a limited reading programme. Indeed, Maffeo Vegio's description of his own tutor's teaching method in *Le Guidon des Parens* (where each pupil must find an appropriate counter-attack 'aux motifz et obiections') seems to shed light on the *raison d'être* of an all-male debate such as the *Querelle*. A paradox seems inherent in many of the works ostensibly deprecating or praising the female sex, for the more extreme the arguments are, the more ease the reader has in finding reasons to contradict them. In many cases, the reasoning of these writers is pushed to such extremes that their works present grotesque caricatures of women, to be laughed at rather than taken seriously. Moreover, it is a common characteristic of the polemical writer to emphasize the entertainment value of his piece, thereby deflecting attention from any misogynistic motives he may have: '... vous inciter, gayement à bien rire' (Du Pont, introduction). K.K. Ruthven points out the dangers of dismissing works such as these as lacking serious intent. He believes that people sometimes mask aggression by claiming to be joking and that even if rhetorical theory seems to justify such writing, a text of nothing but insulting abuse can only serve to perpetuate the tradition of misogyny.<sup>7</sup> Other writers claim their works to be serious, carefully recording the reputable authorities to which they have had recourse:

Dialogue apologetique excusant ou defendant le devot sexe  
femenin: introduit par deulx personnaiges l'un a nom Bouche  
maldisant: l'autre femme deffendant auquel (pour excuser ou  
deffendre le dict sexe) est alleguée la sainte escripture: les  
docteurs de l'eglise comme saint Jherosme, saint Ambroise,

saint Gregoire, saint Augustin, saint Bernard, et plusieurs  
auctorités des philosophes.<sup>8</sup>

In one text, the author presumptuously commands Christ to take his side:

Soit à ce mien commencement  
Et me doint bon achievement.  
(*La Grant Malice*, f.xlv vo).

By shifting the responsibility for his writing onto a well-established source, the author cleverly succeeds in exempting himself from blame:

Car de moy ne procede mye  
Une parolle ne demye  
Qui ne soit trouvée es histoires  
Et es anciennes memoires  
(*La Grant Malice*, f.xlvi ro).

To define the works related to the *Querelle* would be a daunting task, for its influence seems to have touched almost every text concerned with women in some way. The *Querelle* has been described as 'transgeneric'.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, writings for and against women are composed in both prose and poetry and may be discovered in genres as varied as courtesy literature, dialogues, medical and legal treatises, letters and histories. Thus, the commonplace arguments of the debate feature in works which are both frivolous and serious in intent. In her *Cité des Dames*, Christine attests to this widespread influence of the *Querelle*, noting adherence to such views by authors of every kind:

Il-n'y va pas seulement d'un ou deux hommes... au contraire,  
aucun texte n'en est entièrement exempt. Philosophes, poètes et  
moralistes... il m'était quasiment impossible de trouver un  
texte moral, quel qu'en fût l'auteur, où je ne tombe sur quelque  
chapitre ou paragraphe blâmant les femmes, avant d'en  
achever la lecture (*Cité*, p.36).

Many works (including ones as serious as Barbaro's *De Re Uxoriorum* or Vives' *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*) defend the female sex by promoting the role of the woman in the household as a dignified one. Such writers still maintain that women are men's inferiors in the social hierarchy, but do so by convincing women of the glory of this position. Ironically, literature deprecating women, particularly of a satirical kind, often (no doubt unintentionally) presents women as quick-witted in comparison to their rather dull husbands (see Chapter 3, Section 2). Thus, in this world of illusions, the reader is required to remain on his toes, challenging even the seemingly obvious. To confuse matters further, we find authors contributing works to both sides of the *Querelle* and even offering both opinions within the

same work. Writers seem to switch from one rhetorical stance to another with remarkable ease. In Desmarins de Masan's *Le Rousier des Dames*, the character Equité is introduced to chide the author for dwelling too lengthily on one side of the debate:

Sus le genre masculin  
Parle ung peu par equité,  
Car certes le femenin  
Tu as assez tourmenté.<sup>10</sup>

Obediently, Desmarins de Masan launches straight into a reversal of everything he has stated so far:

Femmes n'ont que gentillesse,  
Hommes que meschanseté;  
Femmes n'ont au cueur rudesse,  
Les hommes y ont cruaulté  
(*Le Rousier*, p.199).

In the anonymous *Monologue fort joyeux*, the adoption of both sides of the *Querelle* by one person is emphasized by the writer's announcement to his audience of his intention to stage a sort of one-man show where all parts will be acted by himself alone:

... Monsieur le Juge,  
Lequel premièrement joueray  
Et puis après je parferay  
Par ordre chascun personnage,  
Mal-Embouché, Gentil-Couraige  
(*Monologue*, p.182).

M.A. Screech directs our attention to the liminary *épître* of Jean Bouchet's *Epistres Morales* for an explanation of an author's lack of scruples in changing his allegiances whenever necessary. It is, of course, the rules of rhetoric which confer such freedom of expression upon the male writer:

Si vous lisez ces morales Epistres  
Considérez le motif de l'acteur,  
Qui a chascun rend ses honneurs et tiltres,  
Voulant garder la reigle d'Orateur.<sup>11</sup>

Even the titles of the works of the *Querelle* are designed to mislead the reader. For example, a reader hoping to find a defence of women would certainly be disappointed with a text like *La Grand Loyaulté des Femmes* which turns out to be highly misogynistic.<sup>12</sup> False titles of this kind seem to belong to the game-like spirit of the *Querelle* which often appears as nothing more than a joke shared by men at the expense of the female sex. The donning of

misleading titles may also be an economic ploy on behalf of the publisher to entice potential buyers of the book.

### The Game

In Chapter 1, I examined R.A. Lanham's definition of 'rhetorical man' as particularly conscious of his speech as a form of game: 'his motivations must be characteristically ludic.... He thinks first of winning, of mastering the rules the current game enforces'. In compliance with this definition, the *Querelle des Femmes* is first and foremost a game with its own set of rules. I will be examining below the rules which govern the works of the *Querelle*. However, I hope first to underline the ludic nature of these writings. In Martin Le Franc's *Champion des Dames*, the *Querelle* is envisaged in military terms as an actual battle taking place between knights in armour. The weapon of both the main opponents, *Franc Vouloir* and *Malebouche*, is their stock of cutting arguments with which they assail one another.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Kelso suggests that Renaissance works in defence of women indicate a survival of the outdated ideal of chivalry:

The knight no longer rode out to do battle against any heretic who denied the supremacy of his lady, but charged with his pen to defend the superior beauty and excellent qualities of the ladies of his city.<sup>14</sup>

Perceived in this light, it hardly seems surprising that more women did not jump to their own defence, for participation on both sides of the *Querelle* does, in fact, appear to have been a 'manly sport'.<sup>15</sup> What seems to have been important in the *Querelle* was to maintain the continuity of the game rather than find a conclusive ending. For many writers, the fun lay in winning one 'round' rather than winning the overall game. The writer of the *Monologue fort joyeux* illustrates how little importance was attached to actually putting an end to the debate. For his own debating characters, he creates a judge whose nonsensical conclusions make a mockery of any serious intention to decide whether woman is devil or angel:

*Bien, mal: lequel est le plus court?*  
Il y a à *mal* mainte lettre,  
Et, pour le donner à congnoistre,  
M signifie 'malice'  
Et par A j'entens 'avarice',  
Et puis par ceste L 'luxure';  
C'est ung grant mal, je vous assure:  
Si Dames l'ont, je n'en sçays rien etc.  
(*Monologue*, p.189).



Moreover, if writers had not wished to sustain play, surely they would not have thrown out the challenge for others to answer them? Even Christine de Pizan finds herself drawn into this continuing game, although remaining something of a player on the sidelines:

Ovide en dit, en un livre qu'il fist,  
Assez de maulz, dont je tiens qu'il meffist,  
Qu'il appella le Remede d'amours,  
Ou leur met sus moult de villaines mours,  
Ordes, laides, pleines de villenie.  
Que telz vices aient je le luy nye,  
Au deffendre de bataille je gage  
Contre tous ceulz qui giter voldront gage.<sup>16</sup>

The *Querelle* is thus an on-going game which, to a certain extent, still exists today. Even in the early fifteenth century, writers seem to have been aware of it as an extended debate, as Jean Le Fèvre comments:

Si croy je que jamais finée  
Ne sera, ne déterminée.<sup>17</sup>

Many of the works of the *Querelle* were composed by the group of writers known as the *rhétoriqueurs*, whose conception of poetry caused them to view artistic technique as highly as the actual subject matter. Consequently, the *Querelle* becomes an excuse for writers to show off their skill and poetical dexterity, while the question of woman's merits at times seems to be almost incidental. In *Les Controverses des Sexes Masculin et Femenin*, the author even admits that his fascination with complex versification has caused him to stray from his main theme:

S'ensuyvent certains divers couplectz par Rythmes fort  
difficilles et de diverses sortes, lesquelz couplectz ne sont  
bonnement à propos de ce livre, mays tel incident servira par  
une maniere de rethorique aux apprantis de tel art (Du Pont,  
f.lix vo).

This preoccupation with ornament manifests itself as a game for one writer to achieve a more flamboyant style than his rivals. Poems are frequently based on a single phrase which the poet must try to vary as many times as possible. Such is the case with *La Louenge et Beauté des Dames* in which almost every verse begins 'Dames sont'. In another piece, alternating four-line stanzas (defending and attacking woman) end throughout with the repeated refrains 'Malheureux est qui rien n'y a' and 'Bien eueux est qui rien n'y a'.<sup>18</sup> Complex verse patterns are a favourite technique with these writers, especially Gratien Du Pont, whose verses may accurately be described as verbal gymnastics: 'Ballade unissonante à refrain, batellé et

coronnée par double couronne equivoquée, chascune ligne portant son equivoque'. Acrostic verses are also common, usually featuring the name of the patron the work is dedicated to. The ludic spirit of such works is particularly evident in the typography which is often teasingly playful. One example of this is found in the section entitled 'S'ensuit la beauté des femmes' of *La Louenge*, where the page is divided into columns, enumerating, in patterns of three, the ingredients necessary for a woman to be considered beautiful (*Troys longs; Troys noirs; Troys Courtz* etc.). Almost every page of Gratien Du Pont's text offers a surprise for the reader, as the typeset is constantly varied. On one occasion, the page is drawn out as a chessboard, each square containing adjectives abusing women. The instructions inform the reader that the board may be 'read' in the direction of any of the set moves for the different chesspieces in order to reveal something of woman's nature! Other works present the reader with enigmatic puzzles to decipher:

fleur            flé  
'Ung grant de sa gueulle a

          pris  
Vent d'ont c'est trouvé  
perflu'            etc.<sup>19</sup>

Exercises of this kind where the reader is invited to participate, serve to draw the author and his audience together in their all-male game. Such 'showiness' or playful jesting, which underlines the importance of the social and public aspect of this writing, is not surprisingly quite absent from women's writing of the same period.

### The Rules

I come now to what may be termed as the set of rules dictating the pattern of the texts forming the *Querelle*. Earlier, I noted that almost every work concerned with women was touched in some way by the extremes of opinion characteristic of the *Querelle*. However, a cluster of writings do exist which seem to have been specifically composed as part of the debate and not just influenced by its structures of thought. To a large extent, the same ideas, themes and figures of expression permeate almost all the texts belonging to the *Querelle*. After reading no more than a handful of such works, the reader quickly becomes familiar with the limited patterns of argument. The main starting point for all these texts is the *Roman de la Rose* without which the *Querelle* would have taken a very different form or may not have existed at all.<sup>20</sup> Most works of the polemic actually cite the *Roman de la Rose* and the other main writings of the *Querelle* somewhere within their own text:

Qui chercheroit dedens voz gardes-robbes,  
L'on trouveroit le *Rommand de la Rose*,  
*Matheolus*, toutes fables et lobes,  
Qui contre nous et nostre honneur despose.  
N'y cherchez pas Vallère, ny Oroze,  
*Le Champion*, ny les *Faitz Maistre Allain*;  
Ils n'y sont pas, par quoi je présume  
Que à clerc innoble il fault livre villain  
(*Advocate des Dames*, p.258).

Authors writing on both sides of the debate use the *Roman de la Rose* as a focal point around which they build their arguments. One work, *Le Giroufflier aulx Dames*, pictures Guillaume de Lorris wandering alone, reading the *Roman de la Rose* aloud. Dame Raison suddenly appears and chides the author for writing such abusive falsehoods in his 'livre maudit'. Guillaume de Lorris in the guise of Entendement defends himself, declaring that had he been able to complete the book himself, it would have had a very different ending:

L'ay commencé et ne l'ay peu parfaire  
Pour la cause de la fragilité  
De tout mon corps qu'est à debilité,  
Et me convint devant heure mourir  
Et plus n'ay peu ma matière suyvir.  
Et quoy que on mist à l'achevement,  
Je ne fis fors que le commencement...  
Mais, à conclure selon mon sentement,  
La fin seroit que en dame parfaicte  
N'eut oncques mal ne villanie faicte.<sup>21</sup>

Above, I noted that in the *Cité des Dames*, Christine had been warned by her mentors that the language of men is full of illusions and must not always be taken at face value: 'Quant aux poètes dont tu parles, ne sais-tu pas que leur langage est souvent figuré, et que l'on doit parfois comprendre tout le contraire du sens littéral?' This is, of course, the language of allegory, which starting from the *Roman de la Rose*, dominates the greater part of the works in the *Querelle*. Very much in the spirit of the *Roman de la Rose*, the character Verité of *Le Rousier* sets about an extended comparison between the rose bush and the female sex:

Soubz la couleur d'humilité  
Une femme tousjours t'oindra,  
Mais puis, c'elle peust, par faulseté  
Sois asseuré qu'elle te poindra  
(*Le Rousier*, p.192).

As a means of challenging this well-established metaphor of woman as rose, the author of one of the defences of woman, instead, envisages the female sex in terms of a clove tree:

Mais se tu as Villenie suivy,  
Dont tout ton cuer en est jà assouvy,  
Et l'as trouvé en ton villain rosier,  
Pas n'as serché en nostre giroufflier,  
Où est enclos honneur et gentillesse  
Que en vertus de bien servir ne cesse  
(*Le Giroufflier*, p.255).

*La Louenge et Beauté des Dames* draws particularly striking metaphors from the natural world in order to convey the virtues of womanhood. Amongst other things, woman is depicted as jewels, soothing oil, a throne of honour, dew, a flowering olive branch, the sun, stars, rivers, the sea and even rain. However, as in many of the *Querelle* pieces, towards the end, *La Louenge* slips into exaggeration whereby women's goodness becomes infinite:

Dames sont ung ciel de liesse,  
Ung paradis de courtoisie,  
Ung droit abisme de largesse  
(*La Louenge*, p.292).

In spite of my definition of the language of the *Querelle* as essentially figurative, this does not mean that it is always of a refined nature. On the contrary, a common complaint of those on the pro-woman side is that the maligners all too often have recourse to insulting and vulgar turns of phrase:

Monseigneur, (vous) ouyez son langaige,  
Qui n'est pas seulement satyre,  
Mais rongneulx et [tout] plain d'oultraige  
(*Monologue*, p.185).

A brief survey of the misogynistic writings in the debate attests to the validity of such complaints, the following illustration being one of the milder examples:

Femme de vestement parée  
A ung fumier est comparée  
Qui de neige fait couverture  
Au descouvrir appert l'ordure  
(*La Grant Malice*, f.xlvii vo).

The modesty topos (see Intro.2) rarely occurs in the works of the *Querelle*, except in those written for a specific patron (such as Jean Marot's *Advocate*). In its place, we discover other topoi which are insistently repeated by the 'players' in the *Querelle*. Writers deprecating women always begin by justifying such an attack, claiming that their words are meant only for bad women and not all women in general:

Je protestiz que ne vouloys mesfaire  
Pour rien que fut envers les nobles dames...  
Car je n'entendz parler fors que de celles  
Que se desdyent à fraudes et cautelles  
(Du Pont, ff.v ro-vo).

However, most authors hasten to add that, in fact, few good women actually exist:

Les femmes saiges meritent estre aymées  
Mais au vray dire elles sont cler semées  
Dont pour conclure à petit de parolles  
Communément toutes femmes sont folles  
(Du Pont, f.xix ro).

Another recurrent topos of the misogynistic pieces is for the author to declare impossible the mammoth task of enumerating all the vices of womanhood:

Brief en somme tant de diffame  
Que en dix ans n'auroye tout presché  
(*Monologue*, p.185).

Generally speaking, the works praising women tend to do little more than state the reverse opinion of the texts attacking women. Thus, the *Querelle* takes on a dual structure, where texts may be fitted together in pairs. The most frequent arguments concern varying interpretations of the first few chapters of Genesis. As support for their case, writers pick on the actual substance with which each sex was made. Those maligning women claim that the fertile earth from which Adam was given form is a more noble material than the bones from which woman was created: '... tout bien en advient/ Comme Ble, vin et toutes nourritures' (Du Pont, f.xxxviii ro). The proof that bones are inferior matter is that gambling dice, 'cure oreilles' and little cheap Parisian boxes are made out of them! As a counter-attack, defenders of the female sex point out the lowly nature of earth, the substance of man:

Elle n'est pas crée, de quelque chose inanimée, ou de quelque vile terre comme est l'homme, mais de matiere purifiée, vivifiée, et animée (Agrippa, *De la Noblesse*, sig. B8 ro).

Another common argument is that woman is an imperfect male (this opinion also features in medical thought, as was discussed in the last chapter): 'il est bien vray qu'elle est homme imparfaict' (Du Pont, f.xxxvii vo). Her imperfection is attributable to the fact she was created after man and not in the image of God. Writers frequently claim woman was made as an afterthought, in the same way that a potter will make a little knick-knack out of the scraps

left over from his pot. Contesting such ideas, writers on the other side claim that a potter will continue to turn pots until he is satisfied that he has made the most perfect one. In this way, God, they say, saved his most perfect creation until last, for the world is like a circle joined only by woman: 'La fin est tousjours premiere en l'intention, et derniere en l'execution' (*De la Noblesse*, sig. B6 vo). It is also argued that unlike man, woman was created in paradise and may therefore receive the same status as angels. Other arguments suggest women are the cause of all wars, that they talk too much, are lustful, or that they are artificial in their use of clothes and make-up to mask their true selves. Women's defenders, on the contrary, focus on woman as mother, without whom men could not exist:

Considérez que par nous allaictez  
Avez esté en vostre adolescence,  
Torchéz, lavéz, bercéz, emmallottéz  
(*Advocate des Dames*, pp.233-34).

Naturally, the most perfect mother of all, the Virgin Mary, is used in reply to the antagonistic parading of Eve as carrying the burden of all sin. On the whole, those favouring love and marriage tend to be supporters of the female sex. Arguments for women are often voiced by a female character, such as Jean Marot's *Advocate*, no doubt because this was felt to have a greater impact in swaying the audience's opinion. In one text, the author follows the model of the Vieille in the *Roman de la Rose* and stages a woman (a nun) speaking slightly of women and love.<sup>22</sup> From 1542, the *Querelle* begins to change its tone as it absorbs the Neo-Platonic influence of Ficino and becomes known as the *Querelle des Amyes*.

One of the most frequently adopted devices of the *Querelle* is that of listing. Works may begin with carefully structured points, but gradually deteriorate into nothing more than a string of names quoted to support one side or the other:

De rois, de ducz  
Et d'archeducz  
Voies l'exès:  
Ninus, Bellus,  
Orthopolus,  
Roy Cambisès,  
Calchanimès,  
Offrathenès,  
Darius, Demofon, Mundus,  
Tholomee, Europs, Menetrès  
Et Nembroth, Xercès, Temistès,  
Sont tous par folle amour perdus  
(D'Estrées, *Le Contreblason de  
Faulses Amours*, pp.326-27).

A strategy used by 'players' of both the defence and the opposition is the listing of examples of famous women. A section sometimes containing a hundred or more names of women seems to form an integral part of any writing in the *Querelle*. One of the purposes of passages of this kind must surely have been to display the extent of the author's erudition, for even the most serious writers (such as Agrippa, Bouchet and Lesnauderie) abide by this rule of the game. The selection of women chosen is highly eclectic, placing mythological women alongside biblical ones and, ironically, the same woman will often feature on each side. For instance, Semiramis may be praised by one author for her bold leadership of her country, while blamed by another for her incestuous relationship with her son. Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* is naturally the main source for these lists of famous women, although reference may also have been made to Classical texts such as Plutarch's *Mulierum Virtutes*.<sup>23</sup> The use of famous women on either side of the debate, in a way, seems ambiguous, for the majority of women quoted were notable *public* figures in one way or another. Their victory in battles and success as leaders of countries are hardly examples that any male writer would propose for the sixteenth-century woman. However, I. Maclean suggests that the sixteenth-century woman was intended to interpret them in the light of her own social situation:

The heroic exploits of exceptional women are noted, but moralists do not advise emulation of them, but rather their translation into domestic and private terms.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, in the prologue to the translation of Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*, women are indeed warned to be morally discerning in the way they follow such examples:

Vous scaurez bien cueillir et retenir les choses louables et vertueuses desdictes anciennes dames fuyr et eviter les vicieuses.<sup>25</sup>

\* \* \*

From a study of a few of the numerous works of the *Querelle*, we may conclude that this debate was, in fact, something of a game, where the rules of rhetoric were put into practice. Both the language, so public and argumentative, and the theme, where the female sex becomes the passive, although essential, object of debate, ensure that women will be excluded from this fraternity of male discourse. It is, nonetheless, interesting to imagine, as does Christine de Pizan, the form that the *Querelle* might have taken, had women also been able to join the conversation:

Mais se femmes eussent les livres fait  
Je sçay de vray qu'autrement fust du fait  
(*Epistre du Dieu d'Amours*, p.14).

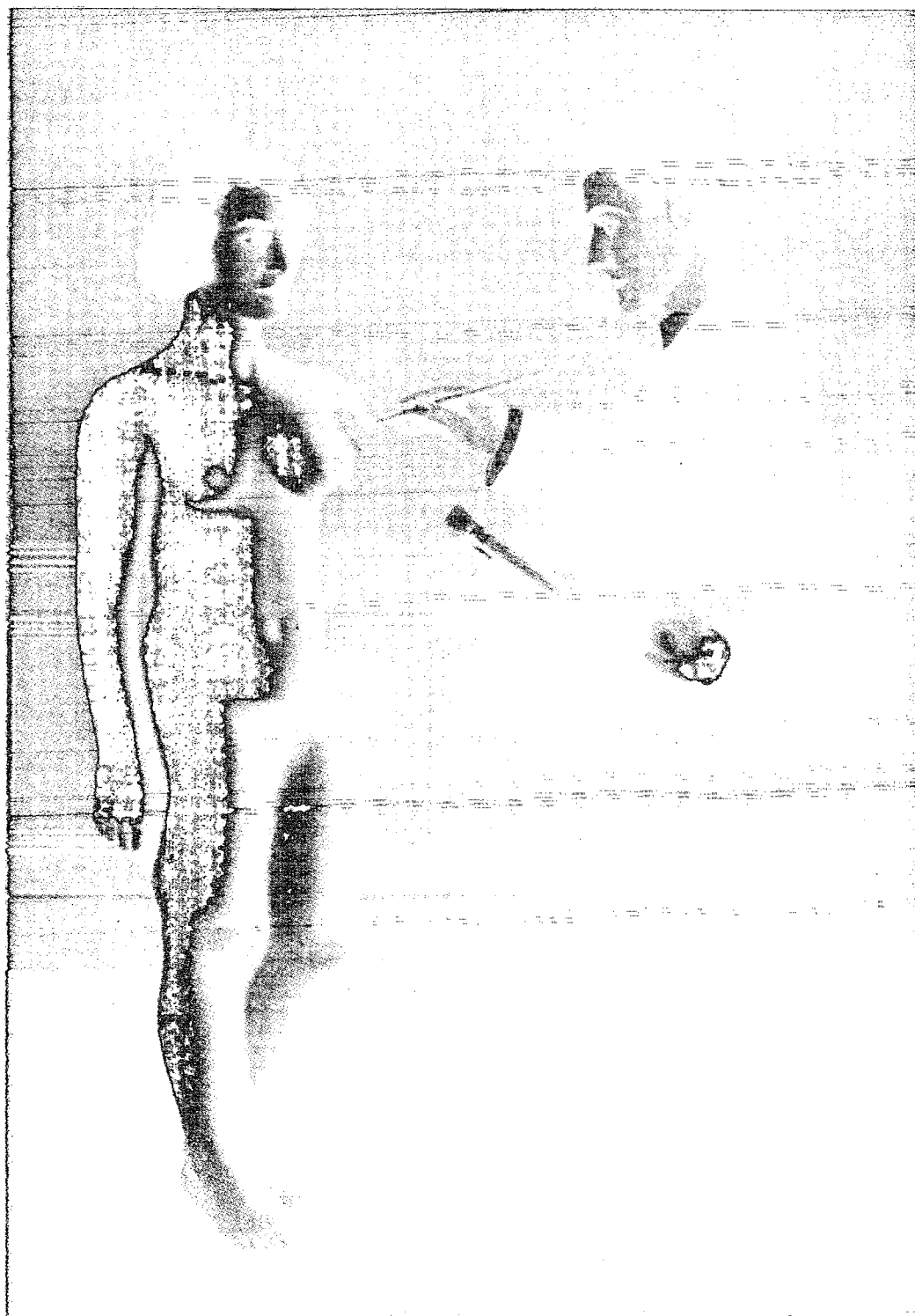


Fig.2 René Magritte, *Tentative de l'Impossible*, 1928.



2. The Dissected Woman: The *Blasons Anatomiques*

The Competition

The examination of the *Querelle des Femmes* underlined the public nature of these writings which were seen to form a corpus of interrelated texts. In much the same way, the *Blasons Anatomiques* may be perceived as constituting a set of largely interdependent poems. Each individual work seems to have been composed not to stand on its own, but as part of a collection of writings by a varied selection of poets. The first *Blasons Anatomiques* were published in 1536 as a supplement to a French translation of Leone Battista Alberti's *Hecatomphile*. Proof of the popularity of the collection is signalled by the fact that this edition was reprinted at least twice before Charles Langelier produced an independent edition of the *blasons* which appeared in 1543.<sup>26</sup> Few *blasons* were published individually, almost all of them being included in these collected editions. Writing, for the *blasonneurs*, was thus a group activity where each contributor was acutely conscious of the work of the other participants. In Clément Marot's *épître* 'A ceulx qui, après l'epigramme du beau tetin, en feirent d'autres', he suggests that the first of the *Blasons Anatomiques* were composed in response to some kind of contest set up after the appearance, in 1536, of his own *blason*, the *Beau Tetin*. Marot records ten different *blasons* which were, apparently, sent to him in Ferrara where he was living in exile at the court of Renée de France:

En me suyvant vous avez blasonné  
Dont haultement je me sens guerdonné,  
L'un, de sa part, la Chevelure blonde,  
L'autre le Cœur, l'autre la Cuisse ronde,  
L'autre la Main descripte proprement,  
L'autre ung bel Oeil deschiffré doctement;  
L'autre ung Esprit, cherchant les Cieulx ouvers;  
L'autre la Bouche, où sont plusieurs beaulx Vers;  
L'autre une larme, et l'autre a faict l'Oreille  
L'autre ung Sourcil, de beaulté non pareille.<sup>27</sup>

According to Marot, Renée was the judge of this literary competition and bestowed the prize of honour on Scève for his *Le Sourcil*. Alison Saunders points out that no evidence exists to suggest that such a competition actually took place and that it is possible that Marot is only speaking figuratively.<sup>28</sup> However, what is certain, is that a competitive spirit pervades the *blasons* which are just as concerned with displaying rhetorical virtuosity as were the pieces in the *Querelle*.

The idea of writing as a shared, social activity is highlighted by frequent references in the *blasons* to the other contributors to the collections:

Il n'y a si gentil esprit  
 Qui n'ait inventé ou escript  
 Quelque chose à l'honneur du corps:  
 J'entends des membres de dehors,  
 Tant que plusieurs qui s'y sont mis  
 Pensent que rien n'y soit obmis.  
 Chascun a faict blason honneste  
 Depuis le pied jusqu'à la teste:  
 L'un la gorge, la main, la bouche,  
 L'autre le lieu où nul ne touche,  
 L'oreille, le front, les cheveulx.  
 Il n'est pas le poil des deux yeulx  
 Qui n'ait son blason de quelqu'un.<sup>29</sup>

One writer even declares his decision to opt out of such rivalry by focusing his attention not on the female anatomy, but on the related subject of a woman's ring:

Je n'oseroys apres tant bons espritz,  
 Mettre en avant mes imperfectz escriptz  
 Pour blasonner quelque membre ou partie  
 Du femenin.<sup>30</sup>

Many writers of this period played a role in creating *blason* collections, although Clément Marot gently rebukes one of the better known writers for not joining the rest:

O Saint Gelais, creature gentile,  
 Dont le sçavoir, dont l'Esprit, dont le stile,  
 Et dont le tout rend la France honnorée.  
 A quoy tient il que ta Plume dorée  
 N'a faict le sien.... (*Epîtres*, p.215).<sup>31</sup>

Whether a competition existed or not, the *blasonneurs* seem united as a group, working together with a common goal. Indeed, this feeling of closeness is encouraged by Marot, who draws the writers together by addressing them with phrases such as : 'Chers amys' and 'Nobles Espritz de France Poëtiques' (*Epîtres*, p.215 and p.213). In the first editions of the *blasons*, the poems were grouped together as a set without any one of them being attributed to a particular author. This sort of anonymous presentation indicates the eclipsing in importance of the individual writer and the focusing of attention onto a group effort. As with the *Querelle* pieces, the *Blasons Anatomiques* are written exclusively by men. The idea of working together was also seen to be characteristic of the *Querelle* and may perhaps be regarded as a feature of male writing which, unlike women's writing, is outward- rather than inward-looking. Moreover, I believe that this perception of writing as a means of social discourse is, in fact, the direct result of the educational system recommended for young men. Accordingly, we may look to women's restrictive education for one of the reasons to suggest why they did not partake in this kind of public writing.

The Poet-Voyeur

A brief study of no more than a handful of the *blasons* elucidates the main reason why the *Blasons Anatomiques* are a male genre. These poems are first and foremost preoccupied with the idea of 'looking at', or, to be more precise, of scrutinizing the various parts of the female anatomy. Verbs of sight occur repeatedly in the *blasons*, transforming the poet into something of a voyeur: 'Qui les *regarde* et les *voit* coulourez'<sup>32</sup>; 'Pied qu'on *regarde* avant cuisse et Tetin'<sup>33</sup> etc. Moreover, the poet's detailed look at the female members is far from being an innocent one. As will be seen below, the poet's voyeuristic stare expresses his sexual desire more than his aesthetic appreciation of the woman being observed. The female, subject of the *blasons*, is thus perceived totally in terms of the perspective of male desire. For a woman writer, engaging in this particular kind of writing would have to entail the impossible task of adopting a masculine view of her own sexuality, or reversing the tradition to depict the male as an object of her own desire. The latter solution, whereby the male anatomy is scrutinized, although theoretically viable, would, of course, have been an unacceptable mode of expression for a woman writer at the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>34</sup> In Chapter 1, I described one of the more important precepts of courtesy literature as being the necessity for women to keep their eyes downcast. The very idea of a woman casting her eyes around herself was contemptible, quite apart from fixing them longingly upon the male body:

Se la fille se trouve en assemblées... n'aura les yeulx mobiles, ne se enquera qui est celle ou celle, car à peine doit elle congnoistre ses voisines, mais couvrera sa face, et ne ouvrera l'oeil, que autant qu'il luy est nécessaire, pour veoir son chemin: Ne convoitera de regarder ou estre veue (Vives, *Institution de la femme*, p.61).

The effect of being blindfolded, or blinkered, reduces the possible range of subject matter accessible to a woman wishing to write. Many female authors, unable to take a good look at the world outside, resort to using their mind's eye to create what, in Part 2 of my thesis, will be seen to be a consciously personal literature. Women were also strongly advised to view their bodies with shame, covering them at all times. This sort of attitude would hardly be an encouragement for women to parade their naked body before a large reading public, by eulogizing its various parts:

Je conseille à jeunes maryéz, quand se devestent de leurs habitz, soy couvrir de honneste vergongne, et ne se monstrent nudz, soit en tenebres, de jour, ou de nuyct (*Institution de la femme*, p.139).

Moreover, like the *Querelle* writings, the *Blasons Anatomiques* are essentially rhetorical pieces praising or, as in the *Contreblasons*, deprecating the female body in exactly the same way that writers took sides in the debate over women's relative merits and failings. The rhetorical nature of the *blasons* is underlined in Sebillet's definition of the genre in his *Art Poétique* written in 1548:

Le Blason est une perpetuelle louange ou continu vitupere de ce qu'on s'est proposé blasonner. Pource serviront bien à celuy qui le voudra faire, tous les lieux de demonstration escrits par les rehetours Grecz et Latins.<sup>35</sup>

The very wording of a section of Marot's *épître* to the *blasonneurs* recalls the topoi found in the texts of the *Querelle*. Marot stresses that his intention is not to insult women, but to compose *Contreblasons* which will prove his rhetorical versatility:

Et que voulu n'ay la bride lascher  
A mes propos pour les Dames fascher;  
Mais voulentiers, qui l'Esprit exercite,  
Ores le Blanc, ores le Noir recite,  
Et est Painctre indigne de louange  
Qui ne sçait paindre aussi bien Diable qu'Ange.  
Après la course il fault tirer la Barre;  
Après Bemol fault chanter en Becarre (*Epîtres*, p.215).

As was discussed in the last section, the woman writer is alienated from rhetorical speech of this kind which calls for an argumentative turn of phrase. It is therefore of little surprise to discover that no collections of *Blasons Anatomiques du corps masculin* have ever been known to exist.<sup>36</sup> Later in the century, Catherine des Roches confronts the challenge of writing a *blason*. To overcome the difficulties outlined above, she adopts the strategy of focusing on the hand of Cupid, thereby moving into the somewhat safer world of mythology:

O belle Main qui l'arc et les flèches ordonne,  
Et les flambeaux ardans de mon cruel Seigneur.<sup>37</sup>

The *blasons* proved to be exceptionally popular. Numerous editions appeared within a few years of Marot's own *Beau Tetin*. The widely printed *Blasons Anatomiques*, being composed in the vernacular, and frequently accompanied by woodcut illustrations, would most certainly have been read by some women. Their reaction to reading a text in which the female body is dissected and ogled over can only be guessed. However, it seems likely that for women, reading of this kind must have been a disorientating and dispiriting exercise. The woman reader of the *blasons* is forced into making a choice; either she becomes an eavesdropper and a reluctant voyeur intruding on a male discourse, or she reads by means of identification with the female subject of the poems, trying in some way to put herself in the place of the

dismembered female body featuring in the *blasons*.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, few female readers would have been able to compete with the perfectly shaped, healthy young bodies viewed in the *blasons*. Our only evidence of woman as a reader of the *Blasons Anatomiques* seems to be Marot's reference to Renée de France as judge of the *blason* competition. This role of judging male virtuosity may remind us of the ladies in *Il Cortegiano*, where women are the inspiration of conversation or writing, but ultimately occupy a position outside the realm of creativity. By means of their talent and wit, the *blasonneurs*, like the courtiers of Urbino, seek to dazzle and seduce their female critic in the same way that they might attempt to succeed in an amorous pursuit.

#### The Poet-Seducer

As might be expected, certain similarities link the various different *Blasons Anatomiques*. One of the most striking features of the *blasons* is the very evident absence of women from poems which ostensibly take the female sex as their central theme. Although the *blason* may set out to describe and praise a hand, knee or eye, the poet actually seems far more interested in examining the effect of the female anatomy upon himself. Therefore, attention is, to a certain extent, deflected from the already half-eclipsed female onto the writer himself. By means of overtly displaying his poetic virtuosity, the poet also ensures that, as a skilful writer, he will become the subject of his own poem. Throughout the *blasons*, the reader's interest is focused onto the subjective response of the *blasonneur* to the part of the female body under scrutiny:

Cœur par lequel le feu en moy s'allume,  
Tant qu'il me fait de la main choir la plume.<sup>39</sup>

OEil, le seul soleil de mon ame,  
De qui la non visible flamme  
En moy fait tous les changemens  
Qu'un soleil fait aux elemens.<sup>40</sup>

The poet may even become so inextricably involved with the limb described that he believes its every movement to be related to his own wishes:

Main qui à moy doit ouvrir, ô Main forte,  
Qui fors à moy, à tous ferme la porte.  
Main qui souvent en estraignant la doigt  
Sans dire mot m'a dict, je ne sçay bien quoy.<sup>41</sup>

Certainly, the poet seems able to envisage the female body only in terms of himself, manipulating the various parts to respond to his own desires:

Bouche où n'y a chose à redire,  
Sinon d'acorder, et me dire:  
Amy je suis Bouche pour toy.<sup>42</sup>

At times, the *blasonneur's* attitude towards the body is so domineering that he may even go as far as claiming it for his own possession:

Cueur franc et net, cueur mien, et non pas d'elle  
Mien je te di, et ay bien ce credit.<sup>43</sup>

The poet-voyeur is rarely content just to look at his object of desire. Consequently, in most *blasons*, the poet moves from contemplation to touch. Having enumerated features of visual beauty, he now concentrates on tactile sensations:

Tresbelle et amoureuse joue  
Sur laquelle mon cueur se joue  
Et mes yeulx prennent leur repas...  
Ronde comme ung croissant de lune  
S'alongeant ung peu vers la bouche,  
Qu'il me tarde que ne te touche  
Et te mesure avec la mienne.<sup>44</sup>

In a natural progression, from touching one part of the body, the poet soon becomes eager to caress the whole. Thus, having broken up the female body into separate parts, the poet now begins to reconstruct it to his own dimensions. By selecting only one part of a body, the poet's imagination may have full freedom in recreating a woman of ideal proportions:

The text attributes the desired object's metamorphosis into a woman to the male's libidinal power to 'fill the woman'... and in this manner allows the 'virile' subject to appropriate the power of female biology.<sup>45</sup>

The attitude of the *blasonneur* becomes that of the seducer in pursuit of sexual gratification, with a sadistic determination to succeed. The poet's intention is always seduction, and whatever his starting point, whether hair, foot or elsewhere, his goal is always the same:

Oreille qui au coeur imprime  
Ce que la bouche luy exprime.  
Oreille à qui il faut parler  
Qui veult jusqu'à la joue aller:  
Mesme qui veult au tetin tendre.<sup>46</sup>

Even the poems dealing not directly with the female, but with her various attributes, take the same line of pursuit as the anatomical *blasons*, as is the case with Salel's *L'Anneau*:

Heureux aneau que, pour laver la main,  
La dame met souvent dedans son sein,  
Que ne m'est il octroyé une chose:  
Que de mon corps se fist Metamorphose

En ta figure, affin de frequenter  
Où ne me puis que de loing presenter.<sup>47</sup>

Exactly the same theme recurs in another *blason* where, this time, the writer longs to be transformed into a mirror, to enable him to witness his lady's most intimate moments:

Je voudrois estre en ta forme changé,  
Et de ce corps pour un temps estrangé,  
A fin de voir, ô quel heur, quel delict!  
M'amie nue hors et dedens le lict.<sup>48</sup>

This pattern of development from sight, to touch, to further desires, no doubt originates from Marot's *Beau Tetin* where the poet speaks of the necessity of restraining this appetite:

Quant on te voit, il vient à mainctz  
Une envie dedans les mains  
De te taster, de te tenir;  
Mais il se fault bien contenir  
D'en approcher, bon gré, ma vie,  
Car il viendroît une aultre envie.<sup>49</sup>

Other *blasonneurs* are less coy and write explicitly about their fantasies. One such example may be found in the anonymous *Le Ventre*, where the author has no scruples about revealing his 'grand poursuyte':

Doncq celuy bien heureux seroit,  
Qui ventre nu te tasteroit  
Encore plus heureux sera,  
Qui dessus toy reposera.<sup>50</sup>

One or two *blasons* are overtly sexual and unacceptably salacious in tone. It is no doubt this kind of poem which provoked the indignation of writers such as Charles de la Hueterie or Gilles Corrozet:

... ô lieu solacieux  
Et gratieux, sejour delicieux,  
Voluptueux plus que tout autre au monde,  
Petit sentier qui droict meîne à la bonde  
Dexcellent bien et souverain plaisir,  
Heureux sera cil duquel le desir  
Contentera, qui prendre te pourra  
Et qui de toy plainement jouyra.<sup>51</sup>

The words 'heureux sera cil' emphasize the masculine perspective of the *blasons* where the conquest is always, without exception, male over female. It is also interesting to note the phraseology adopted by this author, who envisages the sexual act more in terms of a rape than of a shared pleasure ('qui prendre te pourra/ Et qui de toy plainement jouyra').

The Poet as Artisan

The writers of the *Blasons Anatomiques* have total verbal power over their female subject. In their hands, the female body is manipulated and fragmented until it bears little resemblance to the biological reality. The true body is replaced by a creation of the author's ideal image of woman which reduces the many faces of womanhood to one unique concept of female perfection. In my study of courtesy literature, it was seen that only one role was recommended for women to play. Here, we see that there is also only one kind of beauty sought after in the female sex. Indeed, from the pages of the *Blasons Anatomiques*, only one single woman emerges out of the fantasies of the various male authors. The notion of what constitutes beauty was not, of course, invented by the *blasonneurs*, but passed down to them by an already well-established tradition. Works as early as the *Roman de la Rose* describe woman with the same terminology later found in the *blasons*. Moreover, other works of the same period as the *blasons* also categorize the female sex with set description, as, for example, in the anonymous *La Louenge et Beauté des Dames*, where the author declares that a 'belle femme doit avoir' long arms, black eyebrows, short buttocks, fleshy thighs, white teeth, slim fingers etc.<sup>52</sup> A.M. Schmidt's definition of the *blasonneur* as an 'artisan tyrannique' seems a fittingly accurate one.<sup>53</sup> The writer of the *blasons* is indeed something of an artisan or a craftsman, fabricating an art object of perfect beauty. Through a series of alliterative repetitions, which sensuously chant the delights of the female body, the *blasonneur* may succeed in transforming woman into a 'verbal icon'.<sup>54</sup> Following the technique adopted by Marot in his *Beau Tetin*, most writers turn their poems into what has been described as 'l'allure d'un charme, d'une litanie, d'une kyrielle, d'une incantation'.<sup>55</sup> This drawn-out lingering over the naked limbs helps to convey the poet's mounting desire:

Tetin reffect plus blanc qu'un oeuf,  
Tetin de satin blanc tout neuf,  
Tetin qui fais honte à la Rose,  
Tetin plus beau que nulle chose  
(Marot, *Epigrammes*, p.156).

O Doulce Main, Main belle, Main pollie,  
Main qui les cueurs fait lier et deslie,  
Main qui le mien a prins sans y toucher,  
Main qui embrasse, et semond d'approcher.<sup>56</sup>

Woman is thus a voiceless artefact, made for the use of her male creator. The female body becomes the eternal object of desire, for as a work of art, woman's beauty is frozen, and therefore no longer subject to the normal ravages of time. Susan Gubar points out that the notion of possessing a creative gift is most often associated with men (i.e. God the Father, Creator of all things). She suggests that a man's acknowledgement that he was really created



from a female body is a source of great humiliation to him.<sup>57</sup> This idea is illustrated by reference to Pygmalion in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, who, revolted by the faults of the female sex, decides to remain a bachelor. However, another solution becomes possible to him which enables him to appropriate the power of female biology and to preserve intact his ideal vision of womanhood:

But meanwhile, with marvellous artistry, he skilfully carved a snowy ivory statue. He made it lovelier than any woman born, and fell in love with his own creation.<sup>58</sup>

The impression of woman as artefact is heightened by the numerous references throughout the *blasons* to the colour, shape and texture of the limb in question. As craftsman, the *blasonneur* is acutely conscious of casting his material into a particular mould. Phrases such as 'poly', 'painct', 'bien faconné', 'bien filé', 'parfaitement taillée', or 'hault forgeté' stress that the female body of the *blasons* is one which has been carefully shaped by the *blasonneur*. Precise specifications for the form of each part of the body are given; for example, the thigh must be:

... Cuisse rebondie,  
Cuisse refaict e bien planiere,  
Cuisse qui n'est point heronniere,  
Cuisse friande et cuisse ronde.<sup>59</sup>

The ear must likewise conform to particular standards in order to be deemed beautiful:

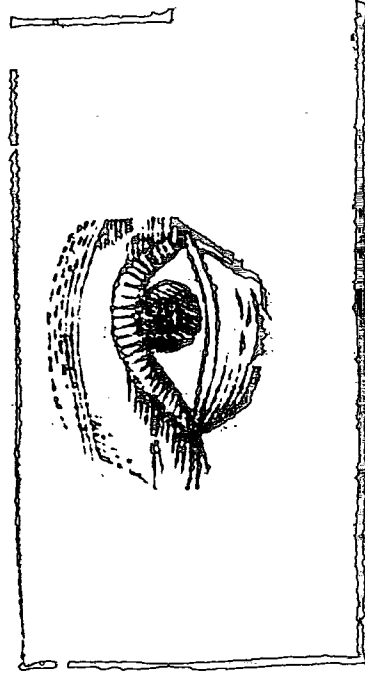
Oreille un petit rondelette,  
Oreille ne grosse ne grasse...  
Oreille qui n'est point trop grande.<sup>60</sup>

The *blasonneur* as painter, is equally sensitive to the shades mixed on his palette. An eyebrow must be: 'Trop plus qu'hebene, ou jayet noircissant'<sup>61</sup> or a cheek: 'D'un peu de couleur purpuraine'.<sup>62</sup> References abound to the plastic materials from which the female body is sculpted. In the various *blasons*, the body is repeatedly compared with gold, coral, enamel, alabaster, ivory, crystal, plaster, marble, satin etc. Although much of this is, of course, conventional description, it is impossible to ignore the frequency and insistence with which such comparisons occur:

O Ventre rond, ventre joly,  
Ventre sur tous le mieulx poly,  
Ventre plus blanc que n'est albastre,  
Ventre en esté plus froid que plastre.<sup>63</sup>

At other times, woman is depicted as a work of art, forged by the hands of God, as is the case with Bonaventure Des Périer's *Le Nombri*:

BLASONS  
Blason de l'œil.



LA MAISON NE VERT.

Œil, non pas œil, mais vn soleil doré,  
Œil comme Dieu de mes yeux honoré,

Œil qui seroit de son affiette & taille  
Durer dix ans encor vne bataille,  
Œil me priuant de regard qu'il me doit  
Me voyant mirer que s'il me regardoit,  
Œil sans lequel mon corps est inutile,  
Œil par lequel mon ame se distille,  
Œil, ô mon œil disant ie te vneil bien,  
Puis que de toy vient mon bien & mon mal,  
Œil bel & net comme nœl azuré,

BLASONS  
Blason de la Main.



CHAPVT.

Double main, main belle, main pollie  
Main qui les cœurs fait lier & delier,  
Main qui le mien à prins sans y toucher,  
Main qui embrasse, & le mond d'aproucher,  
Main qui à moy doit ouuoir (ô main forte)  
Qui fais à moy, à tous ferme la porte,  
Main qui souuent en estaignant le doigt  
Sans dire mot ma dit ie scay bier quoy,  
Main qui la troppe & desche, sans doubter,  
A Cupido seul pourrois offer:  
De ie la main que Cupido feroit  
Mouuoit d'a noir quand il la toucheroit,  
Main qui peut seule & le soir & matin

Fig.3 Antoine Héroet, *Blason de l'Œil*, *Les Blasons Anatomiques*, Paris, 1554, sig. A5 vo.

Fig.4 Claude Chappuys, *Blason de la Main*, *Les Blasons Anatomiques*, Paris, 1554, sig. C6 vo.

Lequel est Souverain Chef d'oeuvre,  
Où naïvement se desoeuvre  
L'art de l'ouvrier qui l'a orné,  
Comme un beau Vase bien tourné,  
Duquel tu es l'achevement.<sup>64</sup>

In many of the *blasons*, the body ceases to be flesh and is actually metamorphosed into a material state:

Tetin dur, non pas Tetin, voyre,  
Mais petite boule d'Ivoyre  
(Marot, *Epigrammes*, p.156).

O ongle non pas ongle, non,  
Mais fin christal....<sup>65</sup>

Oeil, non pas oeil, mais un Soleil doré.<sup>66</sup>

The control exerted by the *blasonneur* over his creation is further emphasized by the woodcuts which generally accompany the *blason* poems in the first collected editions. These consist of a rectangular framework encasing a picture of the part of the female anatomy described (see Figures 3 and 4). Woman's body is, in this way, symbolically enclosed and contained, becoming an exhibit to be admired, quite detached from the real body. The woman of the *blasons* is an ideal figure of the male imagination, although she bears little resemblance to the ideal image of woman found in the courtesy books already examined. The female hands, described by the *blasonneurs*, are never pictured sewing or doing household tasks; the female voice is no longer silenced, and the thigh is not chastely covered. However, if women are suddenly granted the freedom normally denied to them, it is surely only for the benefit of the *blasonneur* alone. A woman in the *blasons* may be able to speak or write, but only in order to express her love for the poet, or compose letters to her lover. We must never forget that these women have no existence other than as verbal expressions of male desire.

If the *blasonneur* is able to mould and sculpt his ideal image of the female anatomy, the power also lies in his hands to destroy his icon at any moment. This is exactly what Clément Marot, in the name of rhetoric, urges his fellow poets to do in his *épître* 'A ceulx qui, après l'epigramme du beau tetin, en feirent d'autres'. In the following passage, it is interesting to note the omnipotence of the *blasonneur*, conveyed by the numerous imperatives and aggressive vocabulary:

Là doncq, là doncq, poulsez, faictes merveilles  
A beaulx Cheveulx et à belles Oreilles,  
Faictes les moy les plus laidz que l'on puisse:  
Pochez cest Oeil, fessez moy ceste Cuisse!  
Descrivez moy en stile espoventable  
Ung Sourcil gris, une Main detestable;

Sus à ce cueur, qu'il me soit pelaudé  
(Marot, *Epîtres*, p.216).

The violence of the poet who is capable of shattering his own creation is evident from Marot's words. Indeed, Kritzman points out that in the *Contreblasons*, erotic desire may be transformed into 'a writing activity that verges on a kind of perverse and sadistic pleasure'.<sup>67</sup> In Marot's *Laid Tetin*, all shape and colour are taken from the breast, which is left as a formless piece of flesh: 'Tetin qui n'as rien que la peau' (*Epigrammes*, p.158). The pattern of the *Contreblason* remains similar to that of the *Beau Tetin*, where sight moves towards touch. However, now, the poet jokingly reverses his original formula:

Quand on te voit, il vient à maintz  
Une envie dedans les mains  
De te prendre avec des gans doubles.  
(Marot, *Epigrammes*, p.159).

The *Contreblasons* were, in fact, less popular than the *Blasons Anatomiques*; few writers responding to Marot's challenge. Charles de la Hueterie seems to have been the only writer to make extensive use of the genre, although his aim, being didactic, was very different from Marot's.<sup>68</sup>

### The *Blasons Domestiques*

In 1539, the writer Gilles Corrozet wrote a series of *blasons* enumerating the contents of a house. These *blasons* were intended to combat the sensuality of the *Blasons Anatomiques* (see 'Contre les Blasonneurs des Membres', Figure 5). Corrozet focuses on an image of the house as a place of safety, space, light, and cleanliness. The furniture described is all polished and a sense of order reigns in each room:

Table clere, table luyante...  
Table tous les jours bien frotée.<sup>69</sup>

The house is not empty, but is, significantly, inhabited by a married couple whose legitimate pleasures are underlined by the *blason* depicting the marital bed:

Lict beneist de la main du prebtre,  
Lict separé de tout delict  
O lict pudique, O chaste lict  
Où la femme et le mary cher  
Sont jointz de Dieu en une chair  
(f.17 vo).

# Contre les

## BLASONNEURS

### DES MEMBRES.



'Honnesteté qui doit estre  
 en la bouche,  
 Les motz dorez que par es-  
 cript on couche,  
 Donnent louengs & honneur non en  
 vain,

Fig.5 Gilles Corrozet, *Contre les Blasonneurs des Membres, Les Blasons Domestiques*, Paris, 1539, sig. E6 ro.

Instead of uncovering woman's limbs, Corrozet concentrates on chastely dressing the female body:

Coffre luysant et bien froté,  
Coffre qui n'est jamais croté,  
Coffre dans lequel se repose,  
Le perfun mieulx sentant que Rose,  
Coffre où sont mis les parementz,  
Les atours et vestementz  
Qui cachent la poitrine blanche  
Le Tetin, la Cuisse et la hanche.  
(f.23 vo)

Thus, by adapting the original *blason* formula, Corrozet leaves us with a picture of woman taken back into the parameters of her defined area and enclosed in the safety of the household.

### 3. The Petrified Woman: The Sixteenth-Century Emblem.

#### A Didactic Tool

The French emblem book seems to have been at its height of popularity in France between 1530 and 1550.<sup>70</sup> Following the appearance in 1536 of a French translation of Andrea Alciati's *Emblematum Liber*, numerous French writers begin to produce their own books of emblems.<sup>71</sup> In their prefaces, many make reference to Alciati, whose role in laying down the foundations for the development of this genre cannot be overstated.<sup>72</sup> However, Alison Saunders, in *The Sixteenth-Century French Emblem Book*, draws attention to the fact that the originator of the genre and the later French emblematisers differ greatly in the manner in which they conceive the purpose of the emblem book.<sup>73</sup> Alciati seems to have regarded his own emblem book as something of an intellectual exercise, consisting of a series of riddles in Latin to be solved by an élite and, no doubt, male public. It is also possible that the idea of accompanying the emblem with an illustration came from the Augsburg publisher, Heinrich Steyner, rather than from Alciati himself.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, in the hands of the French writers, the emblematic form becomes an effective didactic medium; a popular genre of which the combination of illustration and verse forms an integral part.

Generally speaking, the main difference between Alciati's emblems and those of the French writers lies in their use of the riddle. Alciati presents his readers with a puzzle which they must solve alone, unaided by any explanations from the author. By leaving the readers to discover their own solutions to his riddle, Alciati seems to be implicitly accepting each reader's freedom to find a different interpretation. In this way, the emblematic form becomes a catalyst for unlimited meanings, turning the process of reading into a varied and stimulating act. Reading of this kind is evidently intended solely for men, as the Latin medium adopted ensures women's exclusion. French emblematisers also offer their readers a riddle, in the form of an enigmatic illustration sometimes accompanied by a short verse. A reader opening an emblem book will naturally first look at the woodcut illustration, before reading the verse passage opposite. In most cases, the picture will beg the question 'why?', to which the reader will seek a response. However, rather than leaving the reader at this point to take the initiative in solving the riddle, the French writers intervene with an explanatory verse. By answering the riddle themselves, the emblematisers curtail the development of any further meanings. Thus, reading now becomes a restrictive process which permits only one solution, while disallowing any contradiction. Most readers will no doubt be unaware that they have been deprived of the possibility of inventing their own solutions, for once a persuasive explanation has been given, any other will automatically vanish from the reader's

mind. Indeed, as D.S. Russel comments, the particular mode of reading which the emblematic form necessitates is an ironically satisfying one:

The reader discovers the solution to this riddle through a series of references back and forth between the text and the illustration. Such an investigation holds the reader's attention fixed as if in suspension outside the kind of time which presides over the experience of reading a normally discursive textual presentation. The requirements of this investigation abolish any impression of logical, progressive discursive explanation; so when the reader discovers the solution to this riddle, he is as though 'ravished' by his agreeably sudden comprehension of the message. The advantage of revelation is that it forces an immediate and total acceptance of the message in a way that a logical argument cannot.<sup>75</sup>

Reading in the manner described by Russel implies total manipulation of the reader by the author whose voice becomes forceful and authoritative; the voice of the teacher instructing a pupil. Thus, from its starting point as a rather elliptical, hermetic genre, the emblem becomes a more straightforward tool for the teaching of virtue. This change in emphasis would seem to imply that the new conception of the emblem is as a genre suitable for a wider audience of limited education, probably including women. The co-existence of vernacular texts at the same period as Latin ones also supports this theory. Indeed, in his *La Morosophie*, Guillaume de La Perrière highlights the existence of translations into French for the benefit of readers who had no knowledge of the Latin language:

... et yceux quatre vers Latins (pour ceux qui ne sont instituez  
en langue latine) j'ay reduit en quatre vers François, ce que n'a  
pas esté sans vexation de mon esperit.<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, at this period in time, it seems possible that the main readership of didactic literature was female (see Section 4 of this chapter). Saunders points out that long before the appearance of the emblem, there was already a strong tradition in France, linking illustrated literature with a didactic intent. Works such as the *Biblia Pauperum*, a simplified version of the Bible accompanied by annotated pictures, provided instructive reading matter for readers with a low level of literacy.<sup>77</sup> Proof that emblem books were read by women comes from the writers themselves. In the preface to the French translation of the *Emblematum Liber*, Jean Le Fevre excuses his work, advising his dedicatee, Philippe Chabot, to pass it on to his wife if he finds that the reading is not stimulating enough for himself:

Toutesfois si ceste petite besongne se trouve debilement  
pourveue d'auctorité pour assister souz vostre lecture, il pourra  
parvenir devant ma Dame vostre treschere amie et espouse  
(p.6).<sup>78</sup>

The emblems were also obviously considered suitable reading matter for the more educated woman, as La Perrière takes the liberty of dedicating his *Le Theatre des bons engins* to Marguerite de Navarre. In his *épître* to her, La Perrière concentrates on underlining the link



between the Egyptian hieroglyph and the emblematic form, possibly with the intention of raising the status of what may have been seen as a popular genre:

Au surplus (Madame) ce n'est pas seulement de nostre temps que les Emblemes sont en bruit, pris et singuliere veneration, ains c'est de toute ancienneté et presque dès le commencement du monde: Car les Egiptiens qui se reputent estre les premiers hommes du monde, avant l'usage des lettres, escrivoient par figures et ymages tant d'hommes, bestes et oyseaulx, poissons, que serpentz, par icelles exprimant leurs intentions, comme recitent tresanciens auteurs (pp.7-8).<sup>79</sup>

A strange incongruity exists between La Perrière's decision to dedicate his work to such an important female figure and the deeply misogynistic portrait of women which emerges from *Le Theatre*.<sup>80</sup> Few of his emblems take into consideration a female readership, and the world depicted is essentially a masculine one, where we frequently observe a kind of tacit complicity between the author and the reader, who, by implication, appears to be male:

Les femmes sont en caquet tant affables  
Qu'elles nous font prendre souriz pour chatz  
(p.187).

Moreover, when words of advice are proffered, they refer in general to male roles, as for example, in an emblem instructing fathers, which totally avoids any mention of the role of the mother (see *Le Theatre*, p.105). For a woman confronted with a text which having invited her to read, then snubs her presence, reading must have been a particularly alienating experience.<sup>81</sup> Other emblematisers, and in particular Corrozet, although no less masculine in approach, do tend to employ the all-inclusive 'nous' form, referring to readers of both sexes.

The didactic and moralizing intent of the French writers becomes obvious from a cursory glance at the prefaces to their books. The dual notion of pleasure and learning seems to have been the emblematiser's chief concern. In order to achieve this goal, the illustration becomes a necessary component of the emblem, serving as sugar on the moralistic pill:

Pour le plaisir qu'on y pourra comprendre  
Et pour le bien qu'on y pourra apprendre,  
Et pour autant que l'esprit s'esjouit,  
Quand avecq luy de son bien l'oeil jouit,  
Chascune hystoire est d'ymage illustrée,  
Affin que soit plus clairement monstrees  
L'invention, et la rendre autenticque  
(*Hécatomgraphie*, p.xxvii).

Corrozet's use of the word 'clairement' is a key one for an understanding of the French emblem books. In his own work, to ensure clarity of meaning, he includes a particularly long verse passage explaining the relationship between the illustration and the quatrain. For

numerous reasons, the emblematic form is highly suitable as a medium for instruction. By nature, the emblem is pleasingly pictorial, often doing little more than giving a detailed description of the accompanying illustration. This somewhat superfluous duplication of the visual aspect of the emblem serves to produce an easily readable and memorable genre. Likewise, preference for brevity and a certain snappiness, where the momentum is often sustained by movement towards a surprise ending in the form of a punch line, ensures that the author's message will receive greater attention. Use of the anecdote or fable is a common device in the emblem for rendering a lesson more palatable. The emblemist's message is also emphasized through constant repetition of the same themes, both within one emblem book as well as from one book to another. Therefore, the emblemist holds in his hands the perfect tool for persuasion, of which he rarely fails to take advantage. The implications of such authority are serious for women. Any author hoping to impose his own moral vision of the ideal feminine behaviour is certain of being guaranteed a receptive audience. Most emblem books have the appearance of being an encyclopaedic reference book, conveying commonplace universal truths, which demand no questioning or further inquiry by the reader. In turning to the emblem book, the reader is prepared to receive accepted truths about human nature, and is unlikely to doubt the omnipotent author. Understandably, the emblem book is yet another mode of writing adopted exclusively by male authors.<sup>82</sup> For a woman to 'speak' with such authority, standing as a moral instructor, would have entailed an unthinkable reversal of sex roles.

### Wayward Women

It must be remembered that emblem books deal with a wide variety of different subjects, including friendship, love, courtlife, war, wealth, children etc. In his preface, Corrozet stresses that such variety is part of a deliberate ploy to please the reader:

Mais, en voyant que n'est point desprisé  
Le bon ouvrier qui l'ouvrage varie,  
Comme un orfevre en son orfaverie,  
Qui d'ung argent faict ung pot, ung ymage,  
Puis en changeant et deguisant l'ouvrage,  
Il en faict tout ce qui luy vient à gré (p.xxv).

The theme of woman is in fact a relatively minor one in most emblem books. However, inclusion of emblems treating the female sex as a separate category is significant in itself, for no such equivalent exists for the male sex as a whole. The majority of the other emblems dealing with vice and virtue are directed to humanity in general, rather than to one specific sex. From the emblems concerned with the female sex, the image of woman which emerges

is remarkably similar to that found in the works of the *Querelle*, only in the case of the former, material is presented in a far more digestible manner than in the overtly polemical texts. Indeed, where misogyny occurred in the *Querelle*, the rhetorical nature of the debate meant that such views were challenged and contradicted. In the case of the emblem, the authoritative voice of the writer encourages the reader to receive the book as consisting of unquestionable truths. The world of emblematic literature is a world peopled with prostitutes, adulterous wives, and scheming wily women. The succinct structure of the emblem is often used to advantage by the writer, who may hold back an element of surprise till the last lines, heightening the mnemonic quality of his message:

Un homme avec des joncs d'Espagne  
Faisoit cordes incessamment:  
Mais pour quelque peine qu'il preigne,  
Il n'en ha rien finalement:  
Car son Anesse hastivement  
Mengeoit pour foin tout son ouvrage.  
Maintes femmes pareillement,  
Consument tost grand labourage  
(Alciati, p.28).

In this way, a subjective opinion takes on the appearance of a moral truth. By associating two normally unrelated subjects (donkey and woman), the emblem succeeds in representing itself pictorially in the reader's mind. Another emblem pictures Minerva entwined in the net of Bacchus and Venus, the final conclusion being 'Que vin et femme, attrapent le plus saige' (*Le Theatre*, p.15). The use of the anecdote is a particularly common method of illustrating female vice, as in one of Corrozet's emblems depicting woman as adulterous. A husband, dissatisfied with his wife's infidelity, invites her family to a banquet, in order to reveal the truth about her. The family expresses disbelief, defending their daughter on the grounds that outwardly she appears so virtuous and chaste. In reply, the husband draws an unusual comparison between his wife and the shoe he is wearing:

Ha! messeigneurs, dit-il, voyez-vous pas  
Ces beaulx souliers dont je marche grans pas,  
Ils sont tout neufz, mais ne savez où est ce  
Que l'un d'iceulx secrètement me blesse,  
Car, soubz douceur par dehors embasmée,  
Gist une aigreur dedans envenimée (p.53).

Occasionally, Corrozet lets fall his emblematic style of writing and slips into a purely moralistic mode where the reader is addressed directly. This occurs in an emblem featuring Cupid burning his blindfold, complaining that women prefer money to love. Corrozet ends the verse passage with the following moral advice:

Or je conseille à vous toutes, mes dames,

Si vous voulez vivre sans honte et blasmes,  
Que vous chassiez par ung propos pudicque  
Ce Cupido et sa mère lubricque,  
Et ne fuyez ce vice seulement,  
Mais avarice aussy semblablement (p.87).

In another emblem, we witness a woman actually removing Cupid's blindfold. Corrozet's advice here reiterates the common view of female chastity and restraint, present in all courtesy books:

Femmes d'honneur, bourgeoises, damoyelles,  
Veufves sans pair, mariées, pucelles,  
Ne vous trompez, et ne vous decepvez.  
Chasteté soit vostre maistresse et guide,  
Et ne laschez à voz désirs la bride,  
Mais restraignez, comme faire debvez.  
Ne temptez point vostre sexe bening,  
N'essayez point si le cueur féminin  
Résistera aux amoureuses flammes (p.101).

As might be expected, in the majority of emblems, love and marriage are viewed with as much suspicion as in the works of the *Querelle*.

#### Role Reversals

One of the most interesting ways in which the emblemalist condemns the wayward woman is by painting a topsy-turvey world in which the traditional sex roles are reversed. The artificiality of this world speaks for itself, requiring little extra comment by the author. By painting a picture of men and women playing the 'wrong' roles, the emblemalist seeks to reaffirm the same gender models defined in courtesy literature. Corrozet's emblem entitled 'Defense du pays' tells the story of a Spartan mother who kills her son for cowardly fleeing from the battle field:

Homme couard, et lasche de courage,  
Effeminé, trop timide et paoureux,  
Ta fuyte m'a au cueur mise une rage,  
Qu'impossible est qu'il soit plus douloureux,  
Car au lieu d'estre envers moy amoureux,  
Laissant pityé et douceur maternelle,  
Je t'occirai d'ung glaive dangereux,  
Prenant le nom d'une mère cruelle (p.11).

Corrozet seems to sympathize neither with the mother whose murder is described as 'oultre nature' nor the son who, criticized for his unmanly behaviour, is seen as 'effeminé' and 'nay contre loy de nature'. It is only in emblems of this kind, where a woman usurps the rights of men, that we may observe a female character speaking of her own accord. The implication is

that woman may speak only when she dons a masculine role. In this case, male effeminacy is held as responsible for precipitating this unacceptable role reversal. A similar reversal of roles occurs in one of Guérault's emblems, which depicts the effeminacy of Hercules once he has fallen in love:

Jadis souloit sa force glorieuse  
Des forts combats emporter le haut prix  
Mais maintenant plus n'est victorieuse:  
Sans coup ferir une femme l'a pris,  
Il feust vainqueur, il est vaincu et pris,  
Il quicte à Mars les assauts et allarmes,  
Et ne retient seulement que les larmes,  
Pour lamenter ce malheur tant nouveau:  
De voir au lieu de ses luysantes armes,  
A son costé la quenoille et fuseau (p.7).

The startling image of Hercules, a model of masculine valour, holding distaff and spindle, highlights the strangeness of a world where the natural roles for each sex are ignored. Few of the women pictured in the emblems actually speak, and those who do are presented as blameworthy in some way. Naturally, the commonplace view of woman as a gossip, deceitful speaker features in a number of emblems:

Les femmes sont en caquet tant affables  
Qu'elles nous font prendre souriz pour chatz  
(*Le Theatre*, p.187).

In the emblem 'Complexion de femme', woman's fickle nature is illustrated by the drawing of a woman clasping a sword in one hand and an olive branch in the other. With this portrait of woman, the omnipotent figure in whose hands man's destiny lies as she adopts the role alternately of peacemaker or warmonger, we are back to the theme of the danger inherent in abandoning the traditional sex roles. A certain power is attributed to women's speech which has the potential to master the strongest men:

Elle a l'esprit, elle a la langue prompte,  
Dont les plus fortz et puissantz elle dompte,  
S'elle ne faict guerre et occision,  
Elle en fera au moins occasion;  
Car son parler a une telle force,  
Qu'à batailler les hommes, elle s'efforce  
(*'Complexion de femme'*, *Hécatomgraphie*, p.155).

Even the woman writer is condemned for expressing herself publicly, although elsewhere the art of writing is perceived as a noble occupation for men (see, in particular, Corrozet's 'Noblesse de Science'):

Ceste dame donc esgarée

De son amy trop rigoureux,  
A escripre s'est préparée,  
Ses regretz, et plaintz douloureux,  
Pour le monstrier à l'amoureux,  
Affin qu'à elle se ralie,  
Mais par telz escriptz malheureux,  
A chascun monstre sa follie  
(*Hécatomgraphie*, p.19).

The emblem may contain a hidden reference to Hélienne de Crenne's *Les Angoysses douloureuses*, which would have been published shortly before the *Hécatomgraphie*. Many of the women appearing in the emblem books are rather violent female figures, such as Medea, who frequently recurs as another example of the contradictory figure of a murderous mother.

#### The Emblematist-Ventriloquist

Equally violent in the emblems, are the numerous allegorical personifications, which, due to their Latin etymology, are mostly female (e.g. Fortune, Occasion, Jeunesse, Témérité, Paix, and Esperance). These somewhat superhuman figures exert total control over the lives of men:

Je fais finer mortelz contentz,  
Noyses, querelles, et debatz,  
Et au plus grans plaisirs m'esbas  
(*'Paix'*, *Hécatomgraphie*, p.113).

The reader may initially be taken in by the repeated use of the first person form by such figures. However, a closer examination of female personifications of this kind reveals that they are, in fact, kept in check by the writer, being denied any speech of their own. The voice of these figures is, without exception, that of the intervening author. Emblems picturing allegorical personifications tend to present the figures as statues or paintings from which a moral may be drawn. Consequently, when these women do speak, they deliberately draw attention to themselves as being no more than iconographical representations:

Celluy qui m'a paincte et taillée,  
Et m'a ceste forme baillée,  
Congnoist assez bien mes effectz,  
Comment furent et seront faictz.  
Je suis paix.... (*Hécatomgraphie*, p.113).

Celluy qui donc a faict ma pourtraicture,  
Ne veult donner à entendre aultre chose,  
Que deffiance est dessoubz moy enclose  
(*'Fortune'*, *Hécatomgraphie*, p.81).

In this manner, we return to the theme of woman as artefact; the insistent use of the masculine 'celluy' emphasizing that the omnipotent artisan is always male. Like puppets on a string, these characters speak only as the mouthpiece of the emblemist who controls their words by a recurrent question/answer technique:

Occasion, s'il advient qu'on s'informe  
De ta façon, de ta peinture et forme,  
Et qu'on demande au vray que signifie  
Ce qui est veu dedans ton effigie,  
Tu respondras en disant en ceste sorte:  
(*Hécatomgraphie*, p.167).

Thus, by presenting a potentially violent female figure as no more than a symbol in the form of a statue or a ventriloquist's dummy, the emblemist is able to employ traditional allegorical personifications to instruct the reader without distorting his own vision of the correct sex roles.

#### The Taming of the Female

The bestiary is one of the more important sources for the emblematic genre and a large number of emblems do use animal imagery to describe the female sex. Woman is frequently depicted as moving, untameable, and unrestrainable:

Si tost pert (en amours) foy de femme  
Comme l'anguille eschappe de la main  
(*Le Theatre*, p.187).

Plus tost pourras arrester le daulphin,  
Que refrener femme de cueur volaige...  
Femme ne veult estre tenue en caige  
(*Le Theatre*, p.203).

Une femme, quoy qu'elle face,  
En reigle ne veult estre mise.  
Elle désire estre en espace  
Sans estre à personne submise,  
Soit en la rue ou en l'eglise,  
Elle est aussy sotte et volaige,  
Querant liberté et franchise,  
Que le petit oyseau ramaige  
(*Hécatomgraphie*, p.161).

Verbs expressing a desire to subjugate, or tame, abound in the emblem books. La Perrière introduces an ironical twist into his account of a husband's struggles in caging his wife, for in the end, it is the husband who finds himself 'harnessed' by his wife's sexual wiles:

Quand le mary la cuyde avoir submise

A son vouloir, pensant en estre maistre,  
En luy donnant du vent de la chemise,  
L'aura soubdain bridé de son chevestre  
(p.203).<sup>83</sup>

Such a view of women is contrasted by another sort of emblem found in every emblem book where the ideal image of woman is portrayed. The emblem first occurs in Alciati's work:

Phidias fait une statue  
De Venus dame en volupté  
Souz ses pieds meit une Tortue,  
Où les moeurs de femme ha noté.  
La Tortue garde son hostel,  
Pour faire voix n'ouvrant la bouche,  
Et tost ha teste et piedz bouté  
En sa maison, dès qu'on la touche  
(p. 115).<sup>84</sup>

Thus, from images of movement and life, we now move to the static, pictorial representation of women, epitomized by the symbol of the tortoise (already observed in Erasmus' *Christiani Matrimonii Institutio*, see Chapter 1, Section 1). The ideal woman becomes a statue, an art object, not dissimilar to the creations of the *blasonneurs*. The emblematist's dream of petrifying the ever-moving female figure may also be found in satirical works of the period. In Matheolus' *Les Lamentations*, the author gleefully remembers the fate of the wife of Lot:

Roide devint come une lame  
Et fu muée en une pierre.  
Ce seroit grant bien, par saint Pierre,  
S'ainsi devenoient roides  
Les femmes plaines de boidies [sic].  
(Matheolus, pp.80-81).<sup>85</sup>

The tortoise topos recurs with only very slight variations in all emblem books. In *Le Theatre*, the illustration pictures Venus with one foot on the tortoise, a key in her hand, and a finger of the other hand pointing to her mouth (see Figure 6):

Par la tortue, entendre est de besoing,  
Que femme honneste aller ne doit pas loing,  
Le doigt leve, qu'à parler ne s'avance,  
La clef en main, denote qu'avoir soing  
Doit sur les biens du mary, par prudence  
(p.47).

Guérout extends the image through a very detailed description of the significance of the statue in his explanatory verse:

Par cela nous faisant entendre,  
Que la femme en toute saison:  
Doit avoir soing de sa maison.



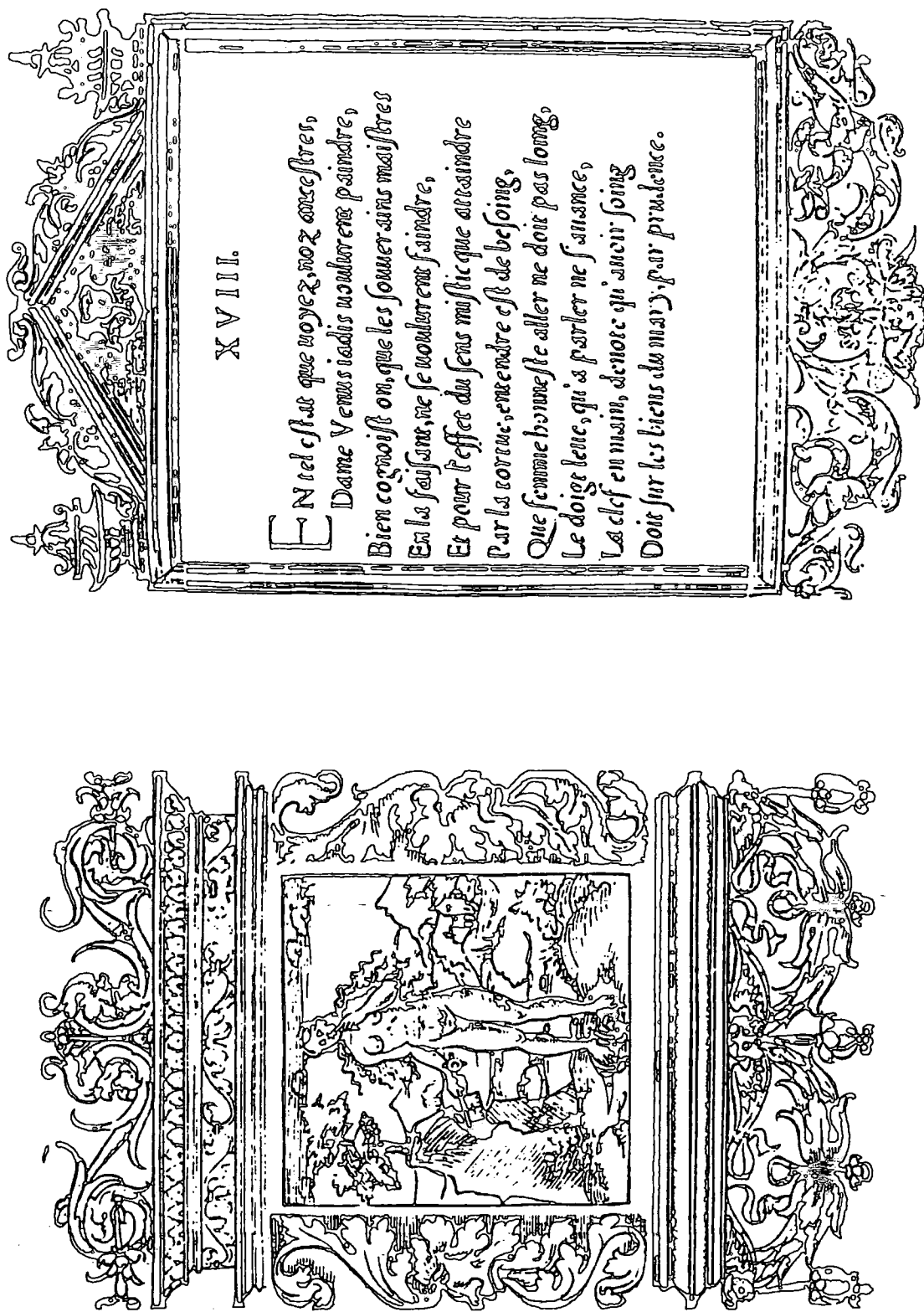


Fig.6 Guillaume de La Perrière, Statue of Venus, *Le Theatre des bons engins*, Paris, 1539 (Scholar's facsimiles and reprints, 1964), pp.46-47.

La femme qui ha le courage  
 Adonné à honnesteté  
 Et desire durant son aage  
 Garder son los et chasteté,  
 Doit ensuyvre la droite sente,  
 De vie honorable, et decente,  
 Se garder de chose entreprendre  
 Dequoy on la puisse reprendre  
 Mais sur tout en toute saison  
 Doit avoir soing de sa maison.  
 La Tortue n'est point volage:  
 Son toict est d'icelle porté,  
 Dehors n'en sort pied, ny viage [sic]  
 Sinon en la nécessité.  
 Tout ainsi la femme prudente  
 Tousjours est chez soy residente,  
 Et ne veut en rue descendre  
 Fors que pour acheter, ou vendre:  
 Pour autant qu'en toute saison  
 Ell'ha le soing de sa maison,  
 Dames d'honneur si voulez tendre  
 Au los qu'on peut de l'honneur prendre:  
 Il vous faut en toute saison  
 Avoir soing de vostre maison  
 (pp.21-22).

Corrozet also includes an emblem on the subject of a statue depicting chastity. However, in place of Venus, he describes Caia Cecilia, the daughter of king Tarquin, whose exemplary life moved the Romans to erect a statue in memory of her. Around this statue, Corrozet imagines there to be a distaff, spindle and slipper:

Car telle ymage assez faisoit entendre  
 Que toute femme à vertu debvoit tendre,  
 Qu'elle debvoit estre laborieuse,  
 Des faictz d'aultruy non pas trop curieuse,  
 Et ne debvoit sans grand cause et raison  
 Aller en ville et laisser sa maison (p.195).

These particular emblems serve to show the very close relationship between word and image in the French emblem books; the static, pictorial element being an integral part of the depiction of the ideal female figure. The metamorphosis of an unrestrainable animal into a rigid statue entails a parallel transition from verbosity to silence. The ideal woman of the emblem has no voice at all, not even the intervening authorial voice of the allegorical personifications. It is also interesting to consider that the emblem itself, with its elaborate frame encasing a woodcut illustration, is a device which quite literally arrests and restrains. The ever-moving female figure is thus caught and enclosed within the emblematic structure itself. At this point, a parallel may be drawn with the *Blasons Domestiques* discussed in the last section. In much the same way as Corrozet led woman back to her own domain, the

emblematisers also cage the wayward woman, carefully guiding her into the security of the house.

\* \* \*

Finally, as a brief afterthought, I feel it is appropriate to draw attention to the fact that most of the emblematisers underline the potential of the emblem to be used as a prototype for the creation of various other art forms:

Aussy pourront ymagers et tailleurs,  
Painctres, brodeurs, orfevres, esmaillours,  
Prendre en ce livre aulcune fantasie,  
Comme ilz feroient d'une tapisserie  
(*Hécatomgraphie*, p.xxvii).

Thus, having been presented as an art object in the gallery of emblems, woman may also run the risk of being transformed into a multiplicity of artefacts of various different materials.<sup>86</sup> In this way, we see how a particular image of woman may be transmitted from one field to another, ensuring that such a vision will gradually become more and more ingrained and accepted as commonplace in sixteenth-century society.

4. Models of Perfection: The Lives of the Female Saints

Woman as Reader

Almost all writers of educational treatises declare reading to be an acceptable activity for the female sex.<sup>87</sup> However, this concession is not quite as innocent as it seems at first appearance. In defending the right for women to read, most writers have the ulterior motive of using the book as a means of manipulation. In the introduction to *Le Jugement poetic de l'honneur femenin*, Jean Bouchet claims that both sexes should be entitled to read, but qualifies his statement by adding that books for women must have a moral basis and be written in the vernacular language. He goes on to explain that silent reading in the household is a much less dangerous activity for women than venturing outside where they may engage in idle conversation with men:

Pourtant ne s'ensuit qu'ilz ne puissent ne doyvent lire sans curiosité en livres moraulx, approuvéz: car mieulx vault telle occupation au secret de sa maison, que les vaines parolles et ocieuses que dient ou pevent dire hommes et femmes assemblez (sig. BB2 vo).

Reading is also favoured for the female sex as it requires the body to adopt the static, motionless poise approved by the emblematisers:

Plutarque dit que jamais femme qui se delecte à l'estude ne se ingerera d'avoir plaisir et delectation en danses et saltations (*Institution de la femme*, p.23).

Indeed, the very nature of the act of reading as a silent and solitary occupation, implies a necessary withdrawal from society which fits in with the general relegation of women to a life indoors. Thus, reading may serve the dual purpose of physically silencing and restraining a woman, as well as acting as moral edification.

Some writers devote at least one section of their treatises to discussing suitable reading matter for the sixteenth-century woman. However, ironically, these plans of study tend to consist mainly of a long catalogue of books to be avoided, only offering the scantiest list of recommended titles. Such is the case with the chapter entitled 'Quelles escriptures elle doit lyre' of Vives' *Institution de la femme*. Vives begins by calling for some kind of public censorship which would prevent the propagation of unsuitable texts:

Les gouverneurs du bien commun doivent avoir esgard non seulement au droict public des foires et marchez et des proces: mais aussi aux meurs publiques et privées, et prohiber sur

l'amende de peine, chansons fetides et libidineuses, ordes et sales, lesquelles aucun bien vivant ne peult ouyr sans facherie, indignation, ou provocation de volupté, et punir ceux qui les composent, qui ne labourent sinon pour corrompre les meurs de la junesse, comme ceulx qui mettent venin es fontaines publiques (p.25).

He then proposes a careful reading programme, banning for the 'femme pudicque' all books on the subject of war and love. Vives' belief in the power of the written word to corrupt is clearly illustrated in his recommendation for women to flee in fear from perilous writings:

Filles et femmes doivent eviter telz livres damnables comme le serpent ou Scorpion: car en iceulx n'y a que corruption de bonnes meurs (p.27).

Indeed, Vives sternly declares that it would be better for women to lose their eyes than read such harmful texts. A long list of prohibited titles is included, consisting mostly of Medieval romance literature:

Lancelot du lac, le Romant de la Rose, Tristan, Fierabras, Merlin, Florimond, Paris et Vienne, Pierre de Province et Maguelonne, Melusine, les faecies de Poge infestissimes (p.25).

A similar list features in 'De l'Office du Mary' where Vives warns the husband that he must supervise his wife's reading with care:

Aucuns livres sont pour composer, et aorner son langage: autres pour voluptez, et passetemps, inutiles comme fables, et inventions de mensonges composées par gens oyseux, ignorans ou vicieux. Ilz sont du tout à rejeter, comme le Peregrin, Tristan, Lancelot, Ogier le Danois, Artus de Bretagne et autres (p.235).

In fact, the only field left open to the woman reader is a Christian one ('non lyre que seulement ce qui appartient à la crainte de Dieu', *Institution de la femme*, p.24), although even within this limited area, Vives lays down further restrictions, preventing a woman from delving into complex theological questions: 'Lors se contentera de son petit scavoir, sans soy fonder en profonde Theologie' (p.27). It is only when Vives has firmly underlined what a woman should not read, that he finally offers a meagre handful of suitable titles:

Plustost liront les vies des Saintz et Saintes, Boece de consolation, la vie des peres, la fleur des commandemens, et autres escriptures salutaires (p.27).

Little variation on this list is to be found in other works, even from a female writer such as Anne de Beaujeu:

Et pour mieulx scavoir vivre et se conduire en devotion, Je vous conseille que lisiez le livret du preud'homme de saint Lis, celluy de saint Pierre de luxembourg, les sommes le roy, l'orologe de sapience, ou aultres livres de la vie des saintz et saintes de Dieu. Aussi les ditz des philosophes et anciens sages, lesquelles doctrines vous doivent estre comme droicte reigle et exemple, et c'est treshonneste occupation, et plaisant passetemps (Beaujeu, sig. A4 vo).<sup>88</sup>

A comparison of the male and female plans of study highlights the restrictive nature of the reading programme for the sixteenth-century woman reader. Vives' *De Ratione Studii Puerilis* (1523), a treatise on the education of boys, consists of a wide-ranging reading list, dividing books into various subject categories such as Religious writers, Historians, Poets, Grammarians, Greek writers etc.<sup>89</sup> The reading list in the parallel *De Ratione Studii Puellaris*, addressed specifically to Princess Mary, but also more generally to all women, fills a single, brief section of the work. Likewise, in Champier's *Nef des Princes*, a wide variety of books is mentioned for the male reader. Men are instructed to begin by studying Grammar 'car c'est la porte et entrée pour parvenir es autres sciences' (f.xvi vo). The Grammarians Champier suggests are Priscian, Diomedes, and the Donat Minor, while alerting male readers to avoid certain modern text books:

Ceux qu'on lit au temps present qui rendent les enfans imbecilles à parler et les rendent plus indoctes à l'ysse que à l'entrée (*Nef des Princes*, f.xvi vo).<sup>90</sup>

For poetry, Champier directs men to poets such as Virgil, Terence, Juvenal, and Ovid. However, even the male student must chose carefully abridged editions, reading only 'es lieux esquelz ne parlent des vices' (*Nef des Princes*, f.xvi vo). Sallust, Livy and Orosius are also mentioned as being useful to introduce the young man to Roman history. Not surprisingly, Cicero's name appears in all reading lists for men, as in his writings the secret to perfect eloquence may be gleaned. Boys are instructed to read their texts in Latin and to use their knowledge of this language for general everyday conversation. An interesting passage in Vives' *De Tradendis Disciplinis* (1531) links the use of Latin with game playing; both, of course, being specifically masculine activities:

Let the boys speak Latin while they are playing. He who speaks in his native tongue should be mulcted by losing a point in the game. In games boys easily speak Latin, and in this way more freely, if whatever is required in the way of speech in the game is first explained by the teacher in good and suitable Latin; for we speak unwillingly when we fear to say something wrong or inappropriate.<sup>91</sup>

On the whole, writers tend to urge women to stick with vernacular texts and would most certainly dissuade them from conversing in what must have been an exclusively masculine language. For men, reading is perceived above all as a means of broadening the mind in order to prepare themselves for entry into the social world. The use of the text as a tool to aid moral improvement does not seem to have been the main concern of the writers prompting young men to turn their attention to reading. In contrast, for women, reading is regarded as a pastime, to be indulged in only 'apres qu'elle aura mis ordre é [sic] sa maison, et en son faict domestic' (*Institution de la femme*, p.27). All treatises discussing women and the act of reading point to the moral utility of this occupation:

Et à tout le moins une fois le jour lisez une feuille ou deux de quelque devot livre pour la refection de vostre ame (Anon., *Petite instruction*, sig. B3 ro).

Thus, by carefully monitoring the texts read by women, men are able to impose a particular behavioural model upon women which may ensure their moral integrity.

### The Saintly Model

One recommendation specifically made to women which occurs repeatedly from one text to another, is the study of the lives of the saints and the Virgin Mary:

Mettez devant voz yeulx l'exemple des benoistz saintz.... Lisez les legendes, et considerez la constance des martyrs et martyres et autres saintz et saintes: lesquelz l'amour naturel de parens et d'enfans, ne de leurs marys n'a point empesché l'amour de Dieu (*Petite instruction*, sig. A3 rō).

Certain saints seem to have been more popular than others, for the same few names are frequently quoted:

Se voulez exemples des saintes vierges, lysez leurs legendes, Barbe, Catherine, Agnes, Lucie, Cecille, Agathe, Marguerite, les unze mille vierges, et autres innumerables (*Institution de la femme*, p.57).

Although some texts exist containing the life of a single saint (e.g. Marguerite or Catherine), women probably read most of the lives in the French edition of Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*. Indeed, in *La Louenge de Mariage*, Lesnauderie informs the reader that discussion of the lives of female saints is unnecessary, for they have already been satisfactorily dealt with by Voragine:

Je laisseray les saintes et canonizées pource qu'ilz sont aux legendes dorées qui sont maintenant en françoys que les femmes pourront veoir et lire (f.ii vo).<sup>92</sup>

The popularity of hagiographical texts is clearly illustrated by the examination of the contents of the library of a figure such as Louis XI's second wife, Charlotte de Savoie. The inventory (from 1484) records a whole host of lives of the saints and the Virgin Mary, including *Revelacions que fist Nostre Dame à sainte Elizabel*; *Revelaciones sancte Brigide*; *Le Livre de sainte Katherine de Sayne*; *Legende dorée*; *Vie Nostre Dame et plusieurs saintes*; *La vie sainte Arragonde*; *Un Petit livre de sainte Clere*; *La vie de saint Jausse*; *Le Livre de translacion de latin en françois de saint Julian*; *Miracles de sainte Katherine*; *La vie saint Vincent*, *Livre commançant 'Humane beate Marie Virginis'* etc.<sup>93</sup> Writers recommending such literature to a female readership stress that women must strive to emulate the exemplary lives of the saintly figures:

La pucelle rememorera par lire ou ouyr innumerables exemples des vertueuses femmes et constantes, notamment des saintes vierges, pour les inciter et suyvre, ou se rendre semblables au mieulx qu'elle pourra. Singulierement celle prestantissime vierge Marie, de laquelle la vie non seulement doit estre exemple aux vierges, mais aux mariées et vefves (*Institution de la femme*, pp.55-56).

By examining several of the lives of the female saints popular at the beginning of the sixteenth century, it becomes possible to form an exact idea of the model which women were being encouraged to follow.

Vives' allusion to 'innumerables exemples des vertueuses femmes' is a slightly misleading one, for it seems to indicate that women were presented with a wide selection of different models to imitate. This is most certainly not the case. In Voragine's *Légende Dorée*, the lives of almost two hundred saints are recorded, although, significantly, only about thirty of these concern female saints. In spite of the predominance of male saints, it is rare to find treatises recommending men to follow the behavioural roles from this work. In fact, very little difference exists between the lives of the female and male saints appearing in the *Légende Dorée* and it is no doubt for this reason that the woman reader is encouraged to read both ('Plustot liront les vies des Saintz et Saintes', *Institution de la femme*, p.27). The numerous lives of the saints are actually remarkably similar, following the same set pattern in almost every example. Thus, from a work like the *Légende Dorée*, a single common prototype emerges, reducing the many lives to one life which is repeated with an almost hypnotic insistence. Repetition of this kind ensures familiarity with, and therefore eventual acceptance of, the saintly model. Régis Boyer points out that this one model may be compared with the epic hero who is simplified and enlarged in order to present an ideal



image of human nature.<sup>94</sup> In this way, the various saints become indistinguishable figures, lacking any notable individuality. They are all idealized to the point where they cease to have any credibility whatsoever as lifelike characters. The female saints of the *Légende Dorée* are all, without exception, young, and outstanding in their physical beauty (e.g. 'Agathe noble vierge fut tresbelle de corps', f.lxii vo). Moreover, the first thing we are usually told about the saint is that she is from a noble background: 'Paule qui estoit noble par lignaige' (f.l vo). The saint always belongs to a privileged and wealthy class and is generally granted the possibility of an education. For the average sixteenth-century reader, emulation of the female saint may therefore offer problems from the very beginning. An elderly, physically unattractive reader from a humble background immediately fails to live up to the saintly model. Jean du Vignay, translator of the *Légende Dorée*, declares that the work is in fact intended for those with limited theological learning:

... et pource qu'il m'est advis que c'est souverain bien faire  
entendre aux gens qui ne sont pas litteréz à la nativité, les vies,  
les passions, et les meurs des Saintz: et aulcuns faictz notoires  
des temps passéz me suis mis à translater en françoys la  
legende des saintz (f.ii vo).

Many readers of these lives will therefore find themselves to be educationally inferior to the heroines presented before them. Virginity and saintliness seem to be inextricably linked in the lives of the saints, for avoidance of any sexual contact seems to have been a prerequisite for canonization. Moreover, the focus on maintaining virginity is so great that at times it seems to take precedence over defence of the Christian faith. The accounts of the saints become one long catalogue of struggles as the character skilfully resists the persistent advances of some lustful youth. Ironically, the saint's beauty and advantageous background serve against her, causing her to become a popular target of male attention. The refusal of the saint to succumb to temptation brings about an inevitable chain of physical torture which finally leads to her death.

The section describing the torture inflicted upon the saints forms the main part of the narrative. The ordeals of the saint are drawn in horrifyingly graphic details which the hagiographer seems to linger over as if revelling in his power to shock. The reader is subjected to the spectacle of the butchering and disfiguring of the female body by the rejected lover or outraged father. This rending of the idealized female body seems remarkably similar to the destruction of woman already observed in *Contreblasons*. Indeed, the hagiographer's obvious enjoyment of dwelling on the emaciated limbs of the female martyr seems quite out of place in a work of which the ultimate goal is moral edification. A short extract from the life of St Julienne illustrates the vivid nature of the passages describing a saint's martyrdom:

... et tantost le prevost la fist griefvement batre de verges et fist pendre demy jour par les cheveux et arrouser sur son chief de plomb fendu. Et quant il veit qu'il ne luy nuysoit il la lya de chaines et la mist en chartre (f.lxv ro).

The torture devised by the offended male is often vindictively sexual in nature. One of the most common tortures inflicted on the body is the burning, twisting and finally ripping out of the female breasts:

Et lors Quintien commanda que les mammelles fussent torses et quant elles auroient longuement esté torses qu'elles fussent couppees (f.lxiii ro).

If the list of tortures seems prolonged, the explanation for this lies in the indestructibility of the saintly body. The saint seems able to endure endless suffering, while remaining physically untouched. Indeed, the extraordinary strength of the body becomes a mirror of the saint's unshakeable spiritual virtue.<sup>95</sup> The saint's near-immortality introduces a supernatural or magical note into the accounts which distances the woman reader even further from her recommended model. Female saints are repeatedly depicted finding ingenious methods to escape the punishment of being dragged to a brothel, where their denial of one man may be avenged by many. It is at this point that divine intervention usually occurs:

Et lors quant on la vouloit trainer au bordel le saint esperit la fist si pesante que on ne la pouvoit nullement mouvoir... et adoncques adiosta avecques les mille hommes cinquante paires de beufz, et toutesfoys la vierge estoit sans mouvoir (St Luce, f.xiii vo).

The saint's body, with its superhuman resistance to torture has little in common with the fragile flesh of the real female body. To draw attention to the perfection of the saintly body must therefore imply a certain denigration of the ordinary body. The implication of the hagiographers is that the saint's preservation of virginity is in some way responsible for this physical robustness. The presentation of a model of virginity to unmarried as well as married sixteenth-century women is obviously highly inappropriate. This model is quite unapproachable by the average woman who will, perforce, fail in any attempt to emulate such an example. The lives of the female saints deny the natural functioning of the female body, while picturing a kind of sex-less body as preferable. The Virgin Mary is of course the ultimate example of saintliness; a mother, yet in a league of her own. Warner expresses her belief that the importance placed on virginity is a reflection of a more general loathing of the normal female body:

The very conditions that make the Virgin sublime are beyond the powers of women to fulfil unless they deny their sex. Accepting the virgin as the ideal of purity implicitly demands

rejecting the ordinary female condition as impure. Accepting virginity as an ideal entails contempt for sex and motherhood, with the result that far from remaining a privileged state undertaken by a few women of vocation, virginity and sexual chastity become a general condition of sinlessness applicable to both the married and the unmarried.<sup>96</sup>

The incongruity of the saintly model for the married reader is especially evident with the life of St Marguerite. Numerous anonymous verse editions of this life exist, attesting to its popularity. The work was traditionally read aloud to women in labour, although by the sixteenth century such a tradition was beginning to be mocked by those of an evangelical or humanistic leaning, as is illustrated by a passage from Rabelais' *Gargantua*. The scene is at the birth of Gargantua where Grandgousier reassures his wife that the pains of childbirth will soon be well rewarded:

Je le prouve (disoit il): Dieu- c'est nostre Sauveur -dict en l'Evangile, *Joan 16*: 'La femme qui est à l'heure de son enfantement a tristesse; mais lors qu'elle a enfanté, elle n'a soubvenir aulcun de son angoisse.'  
-Ha! (dist elle) vous dictes bien, et ayme beaucoup mieulx ouyr telz propos de l'Evangile, et mieulx m'en trouve, que de ouyr la vie de sainte Marguarite, ou quelque aultre caphardie (*Gargantua*, pp.46-47).

St Marguerite's life consists mainly of her struggles to escape the lascivious Olibrius who relentlessly pursues the virginal maiden. There seems to be no obvious reason why this life rather than another was chosen for the consolation of women giving birth, other than Marguerite's own promise to assist in such situations:

Les femmes quant me requerront  
Et en peine d'enfant seront  
Quant feront ma passion lire  
Mon grief tourment et mon martyre  
Que leur mal tu faces cesser  
Et leur fruit baptesme gaigner.<sup>97</sup>

An interesting comparison with the majority of hagiographical works is Jean Bouchet's *L'histoire et cronicque de Clotaire*, which recounts the life of St Radegonde. Bouchet goes out of his way to underline the reliability of the work's historical basis, quoting his various sources: 'sans rien adiouxter du myen fors la concordance de leurs histoires'.<sup>98</sup> Such an attitude contrasts sharply with the markedly fictional creations of most hagiographers. In the saints' lives appearing in the *Légende Dorée*, we are only presented with the vaguest notion of geographical location. Moreover, the lives themselves seem quite timeless, as Boyer comments:

We could speak of a kind of motionless moment, we read a text that obviously does not belong to temporality, it takes place in a sort of small eternity.<sup>99</sup>

One of the most intriguing points about Bouchet's work is that Radegonde is presented, not only as a married woman, but, more importantly, as one who is *not* a virgin. Bouchet insists that no reliable authority exists to disprove this claim, for it is only the more modern works which have stated the contrary:

... or tous les historiens dessus nommés qui sont bien approuvés quant à ceste histoire et aultres plus grandes maintiennent que sainte Radegonde obeit au roy son espoux tout ainsi que une prudente femme doit et est tenue faire à son mary. Mais que pour l'amour maritalle n'oublia celle qu'elle avoit à jesucrist, car son corps ne habandonna tant à son mary charnel qu'elle ne le gardast immaculé à son espoux spirituel (*Histoire et cronicque*, f.xxv vo).

J. Britnell, commenting on this matter, underlines the originality of Bouchet's work, which makes a valiant attempt at extending the saintly model to women of all estates.<sup>100</sup> In accordance with this desire to instruct, Bouchet persistently reminds the female reader of the ways in which Radegonde may be imitated. In this way, Bouchet succeeds in 'humanizing' the saintly model, using it in a constructive manner, as a tool for moral instruction:

Si doyvent sur ce passage toutes jeunes filles prendre exemple et n'estre par orgueil rebelles ne contredisantes aux anciennes femmes si et quant elles leur remonstrent leurs faultes (*Histoire et cronicque*, f.xi ro).

It is somewhat surprising and rather amusing to examine the manner in which the female saints speak. Recommended as behavioural models for the sixteenth-century woman, it would be natural to expect to encounter chastely silent women. This is far from being the case, for the female saints prove to be particularly articulate in the defence of their faith:

Ma pensée est plus ferme que terre et est fondée en jesuchrist, voz parolles sont vens, voz promesses sont pluyes (St Agathe, f.lxii vo).

The language used by these women often tends to be colloquial, if not vulgar, as they chase away pursuing suitors:

Va hors de moy pasture de mort, commencement de peché et nourrissement de felonie, car j'ay jà aultre amy (St Agnes, f.xlii vo).

Episodes involving encounters with the devil are popular and add a picturesque, almost theatrical element to the works. The saint inevitably succeeds in defeating the devil and is frequently pictured dragging off the wriggling creature. Such passages, with their humorous tone, provide a welcome relief from the nauseating ordeals of the female martyr:



Lors Julienne luy lya les mains derriere le dos et le gecta à terre et le batit durement de la chaine dequoy elle estoit lyée.... Quant elle yssit, elle trainnoit apres elle le diable lyé... elle le trayna ainsi par tout le marche et apres le getta en une tresorde fosse (ff.lxv ro-vo).

Ironically, the lives of the saints have much in common with the epics and romances banned from the reading list for women. Most are so entirely lacking in historical foundation that they do in fact seem to belong more to the realm of fiction. Moreover, the supernatural element so frequently found in the saints' lives confirms the strong link with the romance genre. In the life of St Marguerite, the appearance of the devil in the guise of a dragon highlights the similarities of the life of the saint with a typical romance narrative:

Lors advisa ung fier dragon  
En la prison où elle estoit  
Qui de la gueulle feu jettoit  
Par les yeulx et par les aurielles.  
La teste avoit grosse à merveilles  
De la pueur de son alaine  
Estoit la chartre toute plaine  
Quant le veit à elle venir  
Elle ne sceut que devenir...  
Le fier dragon la transgloutie  
Mais en ce faisant se seigna  
Et le dragon parmy creva  
Si que la vierge prevenue  
De la grace de dieu est yssue  
Hors du dragon entiere et saine  
(*Sainte Marguerite*, sig. A3 vo).

As models worthy of imitation, the lives of the saints seem to be a poor choice. A woman can only fail in any attempt to emulate these superhuman examples of perfection. Identification with such figures must have been difficult, if not impossible, for the average sixteenth-century woman. The endless catalogues of tortures inflicted upon the female body make harrowing reading for any reader and especially for a woman reader. The horror of passages of this kind is, thankfully, slightly alleviated by episodes introducing a supernatural element, providing at least some entertainment value for the reader. If we remember that the lives of the saints are the most frequently recommended books for women, the limited nature of these texts is a sad testimony to the restrictions imposed on the sixteenth-century woman as reader.

\* \* \*

From the texts studied so far, it seems possible to conclude that woman's status as reader is a marginal one. Woman is frequently the forgotten addressee in a conversation

where the speaker makes little or no effort to accomodate his speech style to all his listeners. We have seen that many male writers (especially in the *Querelle*) completely ignore the presence of the female reader. Others, such as La Perrière, do no more than pay lip service to their female readers, before launching into a male-oriented dialogue. However, authors who do acknowledge a female readership more often than not take advantage of their position as author in order to manipulate the defenceless reader. Male writers repeatedly use the written text as an effective vehicle for presenting their own vision of the female behavioural model. As Christine de Pizan warns us in her *Cité des Dames*, by constantly being exposed to a male perspective, women run the risk of reading as men and identifying with the male image of the female sex, rather than relying on their own first hand knowledge of what it means to be a woman. In the hands of the male writer, woman is frequently reified, transformed into an art object to be admired or sneered at. Such women are voiceless artefacts, having no psychological authenticity. Indeed, to avoid this fate of existing as nothing more than an image, Anne de Beaujeu advises her daughter not to be afraid to claim a voice of her own:

Aussi n'est il pas beau à femme de façon estre morne ne trop  
peu enlangagée et ymages painctes, et ne servent en ce monde  
que d'y faire ombre, nombre et encombre (quoted from Chapter  
1, Section 1).

Indeed, through the act of speaking/writing, a woman has the possibilty of exchanging her status from passive creation to active creator. In the next chapter, I wish to continue my study of the female role model, turning my attention now to what was by far the most important role for the sixteenth-century woman, the wife.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MARRIAGES MADE IN HEAVEN AND HELL

#### 1. Husbands and Help-meets

##### Paris and Oenone

Erasmus' vision of marriage, as representing the most felicitous of all human relationships ('une union... la plus heureuse qui puisse être'), was seen, in Chapter 1, to be typical of the majority of treatise writers. However, promotion of the role of wife as both essential and dignified is not solely restricted to the courtesy book. A number of literary texts of the same period provide important contributions to the general movement towards rehabilitating the institution of matrimony. One of the most notable works, falling into this category, must surely be *Les Illustrations de Gaule et Singularitez de Troye* (1511), by the writer Jean Lemaire de Belges (1473-c.1515).

In Lemaire's retelling of the Trojan myth, *Les Illustrations*, the reader is immediately alerted to the necessity of adopting an interpretative mode of reading. Lemaire requests his reader to look beyond the narrative surface of the text, to unveil further hidden meanings, which may not be made obvious from a superficial reading:

... toute riche de grans mysteres et intelligences poëtiques et  
philosophales, contenant fructueuse substance souz lescorce  
des fables artificielles (I.4).<sup>1</sup>

Such an overt declaration of the allegorical nature of *Les Illustrations*, ensures that the reader will be prepared for the didactic note underlying Lemaire's writing. While working with a myth as well-established as the Trojan story, Lemaire succeeds in imposing both a moral and a personal angle onto this seemingly inflexible subject matter. One of the most notable ways in which he departs from the traditional form of the fable is to turn it into 'un panégyrique de l'honneur conjugal'.<sup>2</sup> In Lemaire's version of events, emphasis falls in particular on ascertaining the origin of the Trojan war. The judgement scene, at the end of Book 1, becomes the focal point of the work, constituting the turning point in Paris' moral standards, and hence 'lesclaircissement de toute l'histoire Troyenne' (I.4). Paris' choice of Venus (and therefore Helen) is presented by Lemaire in terms of a rejection of legitimate marriage in

favour of an adulterous relationship. Indeed, in the prologue to the second book of *Les Illustrations*, Lemaire directly equates the fall of Troy with the rupture of Paris' marriage vows to his first wife, Oenone:

... depuis quil arresta du tout son regard sur la corpulence de Venus, cestadire, de la belle Heleine, laquelle il ravit et detint iniustement, en brisant et corrompant le sien mariage, et d'autruy: il desprisa... la grand Deesse Iuno, qui domine sur iustes quereles, prouesses, puissances, et conquestes chevaleureuses, et loyaux mariages. Parquoy il encourut tout à une fois lindignation des deux plus vertueuses Deesses: dont icelles ainsi mesprisees, luy... rendirent vengeance meritee, qui fut la ruïne et destruction totale de luy et de son parentage (II.2).

The above quotation reveals Lemaire's belief in the deleterious effects of adultery, disturbing both public and private harmony ('corrompant le sien mariage, et d'autruy').

Anxious to impose a moral reading on 'des fables artificielles', Lemaire extends his myth into a sixteenth-century context, underlining its relevance for a contemporary audience. Specific parallels are clearly set out in order to guide the readers, both male and female, in their moral interpretation of the fable. In the prologues to the first two books, Lemaire assigns certain models for his readers to imitate, while carefully warning them to reject the example of others. The models favoured by the author reveal his particular concern with the traditional sex roles, defined in Chapter 1, and more specifically, with the extreme importance of conjugal love. For young princes, Lemaire declares that moral lessons may easily be gleaned from a reading of *Les Illustrations*:

Dont il appert, que qui veult tirer ceste matiere à sens moral, on la peult appliquer à linstruction et doctrine dun chacun ieune Prince de maison Royale, comme estoit Paris Alexandre (I.6).

Lemaire then specifies one particular reader, who may profit from the 'fructueuse substance' of his text: the future Charles V, nephew of the author's patron, Marguerite d'Autriche. Thus, by equating his mythological characters with real contemporary historical figures, Lemaire succeeds in projecting an ancient fable into a modern setting, while infusing it with new vitality. The male reader is first directed to the example of the behaviour of the youthful Paris, depicted at length in Book 1 of *Les Illustrations*. Paris is praised both for his masculine valour and for his role as exemplary husband:

Il peult (louablement et sans reprehension) ensuivre les actes de Paris Alexandre, filz du Roy Priam de Troye, tant à la chasse comme en armes, et en amours: cestasavoir, en donnant franchement son coeur à une seule chaste Nymphé, ou demydeesse, par loy de mariage (et non autrement) avec



laquelle il hantera (par gayeté amoureuse) les bois et les foretz,  
en habit de pasteur, et de veneur (I.6).

From the moment he selects to live under the symbol of 'la clere planette Venerienne' (II.3), in Lemaire's eyes, Paris ceases to serve as a figure worthy of emulation, now being referred to as 'chetif Paris'. This fall into adultery is accompanied by a corresponding reduction of masculinity, evidently despised by the author:

Paris doncques saddonna deslors en avant à toute voluptueuse  
vie: lascivité et mignotise *effeminee*.... Il se desaccoustuma de  
la chasse et du noble travail dont il avoit esté paravant en  
recommandation louable enervant toute la force de sa  
puissance corporelle, et animosité hautaine, en oisiveté  
venerienne, en reduisant tout son sens et son entente, sans plus  
à complaire à celle qui sera cause de destruire luy et les siens  
(II.128).

At this point, a second model must be found for the male reader and the figure proposed by Lemaire is Hector, known throughout as 'le Preux', and praised for his qualities as a 'mary constant et permanent' (II.124-25). Aware that his audience is principally female ('Princesses, dames et damoiselles, et autre noblesse feminine', I.10), Lemaire, as moralist, also provides a model to be emulated by women. Indeed, the female reader is urged to be particularly attentive to the example of Oenone. Although Oenone's reputation for wifely fidelity was already established through a long literary tradition, Lemaire places particular emphasis on her virtues, changing the focus of the entire fable. The female reader is instructed to learn from the example of Oenone whose perfection is thrown into relief by Lemaire's consistently unfavourable portrait of the lascivious Helen. In the prologue to the second book, Lemaire outlines his identification of Paris' two wives with the two diametrically opposed faces of the goddess Venus. Starting from the prologue, Lemaire sustains this link between the dual figure of Venus and both Oenone and Helen throughout *Les Illustrations*:

Venus dame de mollesse et de lascheté tresdamnable, et lautre  
Venus Deesse damours et de beauté pure et nette, qui sentend  
de vraye amour coniugale et licite. Et ce vous apperra  
clerement, par la diversité des moeurs, et des conditions des  
deux femmes de Paris de Troye: desquelles la premiere estoit  
sa compaignie iuste et legitime par loyal mariage cestasavoir la  
treslouable Nymphé Pegasis Oenone: laquelle combien quelle  
fust repudiee à grand tort, par son mary, vescu neantmoins  
vertueuse, et persevera en sa foy et loyauté, iusques à  
l'extremité de sa mort, trespiteuse et treshonorable. Et lautre,  
cestdasavoir Heleine tresdesloyalle et tresvituperable de toutes  
parts, si elle vescu en grand honte, encores fina elle en plus  
grand malheur et misere. Lequel exemple doit estre de grand  
efficace envers toutes nobles dames (II.2-3).

Helen's identification with Venus is confirmed by Lemaire's appropriate reference to her by the epithet 'la Deesse des femmes', while Oenone's link with 'l'autre Venus' is singled out by Paris himself:

Pour la grand beauté dont ie te voy pleine, il me vient au  
devant en la fantasie, que tu soyes lune des hautes Deesses du  
ciel (I.177).

The judgemental language adopted by Lemaire, reveals his inherently subjective presentation of the Trojan story. Such a stance allows little room for disagreement and ensures that the reader will accept, as his own, Lemaire's particular moral interpretation of the fable. Therefore, before even beginning the text itself, our reading is already coloured by the author's own clearly marked prejudices. Throughout the duration of his narrative, Lemaire continues to steer his reader towards specific moral conclusions. At times, the author, no longer able to remain in the background, interrupts the storytelling, in order to comment on the actions of his characters. Helen, in particular, causes the author to cry out in indignation at every possible occasion:

O merveilleuse inconstance et terrible audace féminine (II.117)

Ce monstre féminin (II.76).

Lemaire's treatment of the Trojan story is an elastic one, where certain passages are greatly extended beyond the source material, while other episodes are reduced to the barest outlines, or entirely neglected. One of the passages most obviously lingered over by the author, is the account of Oenone and Paris' love (see, I.164-99). The sequence of events for this section is taken mainly from Ovid's *Heroides* (no.5), a text which was popular at the beginning of the sixteenth century, both in the original Latin and in translation.<sup>3</sup> However, the passage is of a highly descriptive and detailed nature, much of it seeming to be based solely on Lemaire's imagination. Digressing far from his source, Lemaire gives free rein to his poetic talents during these chapters. One of the most notable characteristics of *Les Illustrations* being Lemaire's careful acknowledgement of his sources, the reader cannot help remarking that he is suspiciously silent on this matter throughout the entire episode (no sources are cited between I.164 and I.196). By focusing our attention on Oenone and Paris, Lemaire transforms the well-known Trojan fable into a celebration of conjugal love:

La même fable, qui est après tout de la grande histoire, conte une éternelle aventure d'amour.  
Lemaire a su la voir et la faire voir sous cet aspect.<sup>4</sup>

The space devoted by the author to the love idyll may be explained by Lemaire's wholehearted approval of this legitimate relationship. In contrast, in the second book of *Les*

*Illustrations*, we observe Lemaire's reluctance to compose an elaborate account of the adultery of Paris and Helen:

*Je me tais icy tout à essient d'exposer comment le ieune Prince Paris fut atteint d'une amour ardent et incredible.... Je me deporté de dire comment le desir nouvelet, de la Royne de Lacedemone, extirpa facilement du leger et volage coeur de Paris la loyale amour pieça enracinée, de sa femme legitime.... Je passe souz silence.... Je laisse aussi descrire.... (II.59).*

Refusing to waste his own literary talents on a subject so morally contemptible, Lemaire refers his readers to other versions of the myth, including Ovid's work:

Toutes ces choses sont bien à plein et bien elegamment couchees es autres oeuvres escrites en François: et mesmement es epistres d'Ovide, nouvellement translatees et mises en impression (II.59).

Moreover, Lemaire nonchalantly dismisses this section of his fable, declaring that 'tout cecy les enfans mesmes le savent raconter' (II.59). Lemaire's silence seems a reliable indication of his moral commitment, for surely a morally neutral writer would have delighted in the poetic potential of Paris' adultery? In contrast with this rather scornful snubbing of what is, after all, a particularly important episode in the Trojan story, Lemaire delights in describing Paris' first love in the minutest of detail. Time seems to be suspended for the duration of these chapters as Lemaire, sensitive to the slightest fluctuation of emotions, records every move of his protagonists. This entire passage is built on the structure of an anachronistic scene of courtly love. From the first exchange of words, Oenone emerges in a position of dominance, speaking 'imperieusement et hautainement'. Paris' contrasting humility is reflected in his initial loss of speech: 'si ne savoit trouver maniere d'entreouvrir la bouche pour mot respondre' (I.167). Repeatedly choosing words such as 'supplier', 'humblésse' and 'mamie', Paris' language is that of the courtly lover, servant to his feudal lady:

Je me nommeray ton serf humble, et ton mancipe et esclave perpetuel, pour faire et disposer de moy à ton plaisir. Et tu te tiendras, pour ma dame et ma maistresse, ma Nymphé, et ma Deesse, seule et unique, en usant sur moy de totale prerogative et autorité (I.182).

Unlike courtly love, which is traditionally adulterous, this love scene concludes with Paris' request for Oenone to remain with him 'par legitime alliance, comme ma propre femme espousee' (I.189).

The love idyll carries a somewhat theatrical feel, constituting perhaps the only example of actual dialogue from all three books of *Les Illustrations*. In fact, the entire scene is constructed on a series of lengthy speeches. Lemaire's use of speech in *Les Illustrations*

generally serves as a means both of ornamenting and enlivening his narrative, as well as focusing the reader's attention on crucial episodes in his rendition of the myth.<sup>5</sup> This is most certainly the case with the section concerning Paris and Oenone. Significantly, the whole scene of Helen and Paris' adultery is devoid of speech, revealing the author's uneasiness when dealing with the subject of adultery. Indeed, as a sign of his condemnation, Lemaire sternly divests his adulteress of the gift of eloquence. The greater part of Helen's speech is reported, somewhat impersonally, in a third person narrative:

Et lors elle respondit clerement et sans feintise, quelle navoit  
point navigué iusques à Troye maugré elle: et que Menelaus  
allast à Dieu: et quelle navoit que faire de son mariage (II.117).

However, while denying Helen a voice with which to speak, Lemaire still manages to convey an image of her as an outspoken, if not vulgar speaker. Helen's enforced silence becomes especially evident when compared with the articulate Oenone, whose speeches represent some of the longest of *Les Illustrations*. It is, no doubt, largely on account of the voice which Lemaire accords her, that Oenone emerges as a psychologically more credible character than the silent Helen. At first sight, such eloquence seems strangely contradictory with Lemaire's initial plan for Oenone to serve as a role model for his female readers. We must remember, however, that Lemaire probably intends Oenone's role to be much the same as that of the collections of famous women, whose example must be translated into domestic terms before emulation becomes possible (see Chapter 2, Section 1). Moreover, a closer examination reveals that Oenone's speech does, in fact, conform very closely with the precepts laid down by the authors of courtesy literature. Throughout her first encounter with Paris, Oenone displays concern with the conventions of social propriety, which would not normally permit a conversation between members of the opposite sex:

Il nest pas bien seant qune Nymphé ou gentilfemme seule,  
tienne si longues paroles à aucun homme mortel (I.168).

Her suspicion of the seductive rhetoric of the male speaker echoes the advice of all etiquette books:

Mais certes les langages assez legers dentre vous iouvenceaux,  
nest sinon un las deceptif, englué de miel soporifere, pour  
attraper et endormir la simple credulité feminine (I.180).

Oenone's speech may be characterized by its lack of ambivalence, particularly when compared with the deceptive flattery employed by Helen's counterpart, 'Venus dame de mollesse et de laschete tresdamnable'. Even the description of the rather husky, sensual

sound of Venus' voice suggests a certain artificiality which is absent from Lemaire's portrait of Oenone:

Venus doncques ainsi aornée, d'une voix doucement organisée  
procedant du creux de sa poitrine (I.243).

Lamoureuse Nymphé... d'une voix plus harmonieuse que les  
accords de la harpe d'Orpheus (I.179).

It is surely no coincidence that the author chooses to depict Helen's speech in terms which are almost identical with his description of Venus:

D'une voix doucette, mieux organisée que la lyre (II.36).

Lemaire appears to go out of his way to emphasize that Oenone's speech does not consist of the teasingly figurative language of the goddess Venus.<sup>6</sup> Phrases announcing her sincerity are a mark of the nymph's unambiguous manner of expression:

Mais ie ne vueil plus que tu ignores... (I.168).

Pourquoy te celerois ie la verité? (I.171).

Unlike the deceptive rhetoric of Venus, Oenone's language always serves to reveal rather than conceal or mask genuine feeling. The effect of sincerity is most certainly enhanced by Oenone's repeated use of the first person, particularly in the plaintive speech following her abandonment by Paris:

*I*ay esté humble et devote envers les Dieux pour celle qui  
occupe mon lieu. Et quand ie veis blanchir tes voiles à ta  
dolente retournée, iestoye si aveuglée, que peu sen faillit que  
ne me meisse en mer, pour aller au devant de toy: mais lasse,  
dolente, ie congny tantost mon meschef predestiné.  
Iapperceus incontinent la matiere de mon deuil perpetuel: et  
commençay deslors à remplir les airs de mes iustes  
querimonies (II.123).

In contrast, the first person may also become a technique for self-advertisement, a cheap device used by a speaker for imposing the self upon an audience. Such is the case with Venus' 'eloquence artificielle':

Or suis ie doncques renommée par tous les climatz du monde, et  
nommée Venus venuste, en beauté principale, Princesse  
d'amours amoureuse; à toutes gens gentille et gracieuse....  
(I.244).

The lulling effect of Venus' insistent use of alliteration illustrates but one of the tricks of persuasion contained in her sugary rhetoric. Devices of this kind are significantly absent

from Oenone's language, although, ironically, her frankness is equally persuasive. Indeed, in Book 2, pity for Oenone's plight is roused, not by complex rhetorical technique, but by a cluster of despairing questions uttered with a 'trenchant cry femenin' (II.120). Oenone is clearly admired by Lemaire as the speaker of truth, whose words contain no alluring riddles. Thus, in the contrasting language of Venus and Oenone, we may perhaps detect a rhetoric of both adultery and of conjugal chastity.

Although not made explicit by Lemaire, the attentive reader may discover certain biblical parallels underlying *Les Illustrations*.<sup>7</sup> Like Adam and Eve, Paris and Oenone initially live in a kind of garden of Eden, a pastoral paradise, where an abundance of succulent fruit may be savoured:

La belle Nymphé Napee, versa en son giron mille especes de  
fruits aromatiques, estans au pannier bien ouvré dosiere, et  
sembloit que la corne d'Achelous rompue par le fort Hercules  
fust illec respandue. Car il y avoit amandes, coingz, citrons,  
dates, figues, grenades, melons, mirabolans, oranges, olives,  
pommes, poires, prunes, pesches, raisins de plusieurs sortes, et  
autres fruits estranges appelez lotes (I.174).

This fruit, feasted on by the young lovers, is a token of their innocent love. Indeed, throughout these scenes, Lemaire repeatedly underlines the innocence and purity surrounding the couple's bliss:

La pure et simple affection de Paris (I.169).

Il fut esmu dun nouveau sentement damours non encore à luy  
accoustumé, et dont luy mesmes estoit ignorant (I.167).

Paris and Oenone's married life in this earthly paradise is brought to an abrupt end by the appearance of Discord, described appropriately as a 'criminelle serpente' (I.221). It is, of course, her apple which, unlike Oenone's 'gracieux fruitage' (I.175), will provoke the divorce of the young lovers. Before the 'fall' occurs, Lemaire carefully highlights the natural backcloth against which their love takes place. The pastoral setting ensures that sexual desire will be presented in terms of its naturalness. Moreover, Lemaire reinforces this idea through expression of their desire by means of two similes drawn from the natural world:

Les pupilles errans et vagabondes en leur circonference,  
estincelloient de desirs amoureux, comme font les rayz du  
Soleil matutin, reverberez en la clere fontaine (I.178-79).

Comme il advient aucunesfois que les pastoureux des champs  
par inadvertence ont laissé un charbon de feu entre les seiches  
fougieres, et il survient aucun impetueux vent chaud et  
meridional, qui allume les festuz et feuilletes gisans alentour,  
tantost la flambe eparse prenant vigueur, surprend ce qui luy

est voisin, et ne cesse de forsener parmy les bruyeres, iusques à ce quelle ayt tout mis en cendre (I.183).

The lovers finally consummate their love in surroundings which reflect the purity of the act:

Elle succomba volontairement sur les tapiz verts de lherbe espesse et drue, semez de flairantes violettes (I.183).

The visual element, paramount in the Oenene/Paris scenes, conspicuously vanishes as the author relates Paris' second marriage. As a sign of his disapproval, Lemaire seems to refuse to employ his artistic talents and reports the sequence of events in a cold, clinical, and largely condensed form:

Recommandoit sa propre personne, en beauté et vaillance, et celles de ses freres. Demonstrait lardante affection damours.... (II.71).

The episode recording the sexual act between Helen and Paris describes it as an organized event, taking place in a sumptuous tent, surrounded by guards. Juno, 'qui preside aux mariages legitimes' (II.79), is significantly absent from the second wedding scene, her place taken by the three furies. Each of Paris' brides weeps after the act of love. However, Lemaire casts doubt on the motives behind Helen's tears, refusing to give one certain explanation:

La cause de son pleur venoit ou pour iuste douleur et remors de conscience de son crime detestable de sa chasteté brisee, et dissolution de son mariage legitime, ou peult estre par feintise feminine: ou autrement pour la signification que le coeur luy apportoit des grans maux qui à ceste cause estoient à advenir (II.82).

The contrast between the two marriages continues to be underlined by Lemaire in his parallel descriptions of the marital home. Oenone and Paris are pictured living in the simplicity of the pastoral setting, a symbol of their moral integrity:

Alors les deux amans se tapissoient en leurs petites maisonnettes pastorales, ayans pour tout habillement à resister contre limpetuosité du froid hyemal des peaux de mouton houssues de leur toison et bien garnies de laine (I.193-94).

Paris and Helen's house, in contrast, spells out the falsity of their illegitimate love:

Un logis de plaisance, magnifique et hautain à merveilles: dont les sommiers estoient tous reluisans de fin or (II.128).

Oenone's moral superiority becomes particularly obvious when we begin to interpret the allegorical language shrouding her outward appearance. As a sign of her virtue, Lemaire adorns her in clothes representative of purity:

En son beau chef elle ne portoit or ne gemmes, mais seulement  
pour la preserver du hasle, un chapeau de branches de laurier,  
qui est un abrisseau dedié à Phebus (I.166).

Venus' apparel strikes an immediate note of contrast with this simplicity, requiring no need for authorial comment:

Ses blonds cheveux espes, estoient richement tressez à petis  
lacs dor trait à maniere de retz, distinguez de fines perles,  
saphirs, topaces, et fines esmeraudes, à grands houppes de soye  
purpurine pendantes derriere le dos (I.242).

Lemaire's particular emphasis on Oenone's natural beauty ('Sa belle face sans fard et sans teinture', I.166) serves to bring out the artificiality of Venus' rather plastic nature:

La polissure unie de son ventre marbrin (I.256).

Le fard coulouré et teint sophistique, dune statue plate et vuide  
(I.258).

This association is confirmed by Lemaire's reference to a legend which mentions the existence of a marble statue of Helen:

Statue de marbre blanc, taillé par grand artifice apres le vif  
(II.81).

Vocabulary of this kind may remind us of the terms employed by the *blasonneurs* in their expression of the kind of love disapproved of by Lemaire. The shapeliness of Oenone's body may only be judged from the perfect form of her naked arms:

La nudité de ses beaux bras bien pleins et bien formez... faisoit  
foy du reste de sa venuste corpulence (I.166).

Venus, however, is clad in a flimsy garment which, as the wind blows, reveals the shape of her entire body in a most erotic manner:

Et estoient tous ses aornemens de si deliee filure, que quand le  
doux vent Subsolanus ventillant pressoit iceux habits contre ses  
precieux membres, il faisoit foy entiere de la rotondité diceux,  
et de la solidité de sa noble corpulence (I.241).

Therefore, in Lemaire's eyes, conjugal chastity or, conversely, adulterous promiscuity may be 'read' in the very manner his characters dress.

Lemaire's description of Oenone's intense suffering as she glimpses Paris returning with his new wife constitutes a particular literary triumph. The author's sensitivity towards the abandoned wife is made obvious by his careful choice of simile to depict the scene:



Adonques la tresdesperee Nymphes frappee du dard rigoureux de iuste douleur, navree cruellement de la pointe de chaste ialousie, et consternee par limpetuosité vehemente damour coniugale... enclina le chef en terre, comme fait une belle violette sa couleur purpurine, quand elle est abatee du fort vent Boreas (II.111).

The unusual combination of 'iuste' and 'douleur', as well as 'chaste' and 'ialousie', highlights Lemaire's empathy with his heroine. To express Oenone's sorrow, Lemaire brings into play his artistic resources in passages which cannot but hold the attention of the reader:

Lors soupirs laggressoient, regrets lassailloient de toutes pars, en plourant gemissoit, et en gemissant plourait (II.119).

Throughout this section of *Les Illustrations*, Lemaire repeatedly praises Oenone for continuing to remain chaste, in spite of her husband's adultery:

La dolente Nymphes Oenone, demeure chaste et entiere à son seigneur et mary: nonobstant que de luy soit abandonnee (II.125).

Lemaire is not alone in holding this notion of morality. In Section 3 of this chapter, a similar view of chastity will emerge from the conversations of the narrators in the *Heptaméron*. On Paris' death, he is carried to Cebrine, the abode of his first wife. Unable to conclude the story of Paris and Oenone on a negative note, Lemaire deliberately puts forward an explanation for this transportation of Paris' body, which is, significantly, absent from his source, Dictys de Crete:

Toutesfois, il est à coniecturer, que à lheure de sa mort, il ordonna ainsi le faire, ayant regard paraventure de lavoir abandonnee contre droit et raison: sachant quelle seule estoit sa femme legitime et non mie Heleine (II.203).

Thus, Lemaire adapts the traditional Trojan fable in order to restore married love to the original garden of Eden.

Lemaire's view of marriage as necessary, if both public and private harmony are to remain intact, pervades the whole of his telling of the Trojan myth. While using a fable already known to his readers, the author succeeds in casting traditional material into a new mould, thereby focusing our attention on aspects of the story which may not before have seemed significant. As instruction, with *Les Illustrations*, Lemaire provides a picture of conjugal love as the sole source of true well-being, urging his readers to imitate this example. In Part 2 of my thesis, I hope to show how this carefully constructed moral framework is

broken down and rejected by a number of women writers who seek to impose an alternative system of morality, based on quite different premises from those put forward by Lemaire (see, in particular, Jeanne Flore's *Comptes Amoureux*).

Macrin and Gelonis

As a second illustration of a literary apology of marriage, I have chosen to examine a selection of poems by the neo-Latin poet, Jean Salmon Macrin (1490-1557). Following his marriage, rather late in life, to the very young Guillonne Boursault, Macrin's writing undergoes a dramatic change in inspiration and tone.<sup>8</sup> Until the appearance of his wife, who features throughout his poems under the name of Gelonis, most of Macrin's poetry tends to be of a religious, encomiastic or moralistic nature, drawing on a Christian inspiration.<sup>9</sup> In 1528, with the publication of his *Carminum Libellus* (later to be known as the *Epithalamiorum Liber*), Macrin imbues his poetry with a new, vital spirit, turning from the influence of Italian poets such as Spagnuoli or Strozzi, to Classical Latin sources including Catullus, Propertius and Tibullus. For the purpose of this study, I will be making reference only to the *Epithalamiorum Liber* (1528-1531) and the first two books of the *Carminum Libri Quatuor* (1530).<sup>10</sup> However, the figure of Gelonis remains the central concern of the greater part of all Macrin's writing from these works onwards.

Macrin's poetry seems especially worthy of mention for the strikingly personal note pervading the poems in celebration of the pleasures of married life. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that his poetry is unique in the sixteenth century; his own sequence of poems about his wife being the only known Neo-Latin writing of this kind. Where many sixteenth-century poets adhere to the tradition of creating an imaginary, literary mistress, Macrin's poems may immediately be set in a category apart, for, with very few exceptions, they are devoted to exalting his own wife. Indeed, the legitimacy of the poet's love is repeatedly underlined by his frequent use of the word 'coniux'. Macrin's conception of matrimony has much in common with the views of courtesy literature outlined in Chapter 1. Throughout his work, the married union is consistently depicted as harmonious, permanent and legitimate. Eager to emphasize that there is nothing illicit about their love, Macrin informs us that parental consent has been sought and granted:

Celle qui vient de m'être promise avec le consentement de son  
père et de sa mère (C.II.2).

In many of his poems, Macrin returns to the theme of happiness brought by marital love. The open rejoicing in his overwhelming devotion to Gelonis turns his anthologies into a

collection of touchingly intimate love poems. For instance, a poem such as E.25 is typical in its passionate declaration of love:

Et pour que la force de mon amour soit mieux connue de toi,  
moi je t'aime plus que la parole ne pourrait l'exprimer. Car si  
l'on pouvait peser tous les amours de tous les amants, mon  
amour, à lui seul, les surpasserait tous! (E.25).

Moreover, Soubeille's translation of this poem does not quite convey the force of the original Latin, where Macrin delays the word 'amor' to the end of each line, ensuring that our attention will be focused on this deliberate repetition:

Utque mei melius tibi vis notescat *amoris*,  
Plus ego te quam vox dicere possit *amo*.  
Nam omnes si possint perpendier omnium *amores*,  
Vincat eos vel meus unus *amor* (E.25).

Repetition is a common device of Macrin's poetry, serving to convey the unique quality of his love with Gelonis: 'te posco *unicam* in *unicaque* fido' (E.16). A brief examination of the poet's use of Catullus reveals the extent to which he favours the nuptial relationship. While openly acknowledging the influence of Catullus (quoting him by name, referring to Verona, Lesbia and, even Lesbia's sparrow), Macrin deliberately flouts the immoral or vulgar aspects of his source. Indeed, Macrin has appropriately been described as 'le Catulle... délicat et tendre'.<sup>11</sup> The example of one line from a poem by Macrin may suffice to illustrate his subtle adaptation of Catullus. Where Catullus writes to Lesbia (his rather promiscuous mistress), 'Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus', Macrin pointedly turns the reference into a more legitimate context, by saying, 'Vivamus mea sicque amemus uxor'.<sup>12</sup> The theme of the thousand kisses, found in Catullus ('da mi basia mille'), is frequently employed by Macrin, who persistently demands incessant kisses from his wife:

Donne-moi et reçois en échange mille tendres petits baisers, à  
lèvres demi-closes (E.9).

However, it immediately becomes evident through the introduction of the word 'reçois' ('Da mi et *accipe*'), that Macrin's kiss is much more of a shared experience than Catullus'.

Both the *Epithalamiorum Liber* and the *Carminum Liber* are centred around the figure of Gelonis with whom Macrin displays an almost obsessive preoccupation. Gelonis' importance becomes twofold, serving firstly as inspiration for her husband's poetic creativity, and secondly, as the predominant subject matter of the majority of the poems. Macrin is the first to acknowledge Gelonis as inspirer, describing his replacement of the literary muse with this more personal influence:

D'ailleurs, s'il y a là quelque agrément et s'il s'en reconte à l'avenir dans les cadences macriniennes, à Gélonis d'en réclamer tout l'honneur, car du coffret offert naguère à son mariage par Vénus et les Amours, elle répandit à flots les odeurs de myrte, imprégna le poème qui lui est consacré du parfum divin de la liqueur Idaliennne et lui incorpora les gracieuses Charites. Si tu as apprécié tel ou tel raffinement, il te faut lui en attribuer le mérite, non à un poète éperdu d'amour, qui meurt de sa folle passion pour elle, dans l'oubli presque complet de ses anciennes Camènes (C.I.16).

In a poem addressed to Guillaume du Bellay, Macrin begs to be granted leave from the court in order to return to Loudun. To give greater sway to his demand, he threatens poetic sterility if Gelonis is kept from him any longer:

Aussi, si tu veux m'entendre réciter un poème digne de captiver tes oreilles, avec la vue de ma douce patrie, rends-moi ma chère Gélonis (C.I.26).

Writing becomes the means for Macrin, fired both with passion and creative inspiration, to experience every delight of his marriage twice over:

Hymen m'a inspiré.... Tandis que la couche est encore brûlante de nos premières ardeurs et que l'épousée n'a pas encore quitté son voile de flamme, je l'ai écrit, possédé par un double enthousiasme (E.18).

When recalling the precious gift of virginity given to him by Gelonis, Macrin anxiously wonders whether he could ever satisfactorily repay such a favour: 'Pour un don si précieux, pourrai-je te récompenser un jour?' (E.10). The poet can offer little in the way of wealth, and his family is of small renown, but, through his poetic talents, Macrin promises Gelonis the gift of immortality:

Le dieu de Thymbra m'accorde la cithare d'ivoire et son inspiration, qui te rendra pour longtemps célèbre et te mènera, épouse de poète, entre doctes mains (C.II.21).

Macrin's choice of the prestigious Latin medium, although the first literary language of the humanists, ensures that his wife will be both ennobled and more securely immortalized. Unlike the flexible vernacular languages, Latin is, of course, more resistant to change over the ages. Interestingly, on the few occasions Macrin sings his love of a literary mistress, his enthusiasm for writing wanes, and the literary act is no longer profitably therapeutic:

Comment expliquer, ma chère âme... que la lyre, dont les faciles accords savaient seuls autrefois alléger mes cruels soucis, me déplaît, et que des vers élégants ne calment plus mes pénibles ennuis? (A Glycere, E.19).

Thus, Gelonis comes to represent the silent inspirer; a feminine role already observed on several occasions in the preceding chapters. Many of the poems of the *Epithalamiorum Liber* and the *Carminum Liber* are directly addressed to Gelonis and almost all mention her in some way. As the centre of the poet's attention, Gelonis becomes the *raison d'être* of the majority of Macrin's poems:

Là-bas, étendu sur le gazon scintillant de rosée, écoutant le  
charmant gazouillis des oiseaux printaniers, c'est toi, Gélonis,  
que par ma chanson, toi que sur mon lyre caressante, je  
célébrerais dans ma félicité (E.2).

The very name Gelonis has something of a magical ring to it, conferring a Classical charm upon Macrin's wife. In fact, this name appears to have been invented by the poet, being based on the Greek for cheerful. Gelonis acts as a kind of magnet, constantly drawing the poet away from his original subject matter back onto herself. A typical example of the manner in which Macrin cleverly steers the theme of a poem round to the subject of Gelonis may be found in E.23. The poem is written in celebration of St Marguerite and tells the story of her martyrdom. Towards the end of the piece, remembering Marguerite's traditional role as protector of women in childbirth, Macrin departs from the main subject to ask Marguerite to watch over his own wife in her pregnancy:

Je la recommande à ta protection: aide-la doucement et calme  
son effroi, dès qu'approchera l'angoissant jour des couches  
(E.23).

However, in spite of the pervasive influence of Gelonis, a tension is created between her apparent omnipresence and her actual physical absence from every one of Macrin's poems. Such an absence will be seen to be even more marked when compared, in Section 2 of this chapter, with the physically present wives of the typical marriage satire. The tension in Macrin's poetry seems to stem from the fact that the only poems to Gelonis are ones composed when the poet is separated from her, on account of his duties with the court. Macrin's love for Gelonis becomes inseparable from his longing to return to his native town, Loudun.<sup>13</sup> In many of his poems, Gelonis is set against a backcloth of the countryside surrounding this town. In her physical absence, Gelonis' presence is evoked solely through the device of imagination or dream:

Lorsque ton image, amie, apparaît devant mes yeux d'époux  
errant si loin de sa ville natale, tu réchauffes mon coeur (E.15).

Many poems grow out of an imagined scene and, therefore, present a rather dream-like, idyllic atmosphere. In his absence from Gelonis, the poet is able to give free rein to his imagination, constructing richly exotic scenes based on sensuous or subtly erotic imagery.

However, the repeated use of the conditional tense reminds the attentive reader that such tableaux have no existence other than as part of the poet's fertile musing:

Alors, lumière de ma vie, m'étreignant de tes bras de neige, tu  
m'oindrais tout le corps avec la liqueur du cannelier de  
Panchaïe, et tu me bercerais de ton murmure imprégné de miel  
Cécropien. Mollement étendus tous les deux sur un délicat lit  
de roses, nous serions soudés l'un à l'autre par nos baisers  
caressants, et nous ne donnerions pas un liard de toutes les  
richesses des rois (E.12).

Macrin's complete surrender to this voluptuous dream is reflected in the confused mixture of sense impressions brought into play. Gelonis's snow-white arms contrast with the bed of roses, while the freshness of her embrace (implicit in the word 'niveis') stands in opposition to the heated atmosphere of passion. A feeling of exoticism is stirred by the mention of Cecropian honey and of the cinnamon liqueur with which Gelonis anoints her husband, as if involved in pagan ritual. The presentation of physical love through the form of a dream helps to preserve it from any vulgarity. Such acts retain an air of mystery, partly on account of being one step removed from the reader, but also through reliance on Classical reference. In this way, their love is transported from its sixteenth-century context into the timeless, eternal setting, necessary to ensure its immortality. Moreover, in passages depicting physical love, Macrin is always careful to insert the word 'uxor' or 'coniux' which reinforces the notion of pure love:

Ah! si, étendu, sur un lit de roses pourprées, la chevelure  
inondée de parfum assyrien, je me livrais avec toi, aimable  
épouse, aux délices et aux doux ébats (C.II.4).

Thus, Gelonis becomes the ideal wife; a literary creation springing from the poet's imagination in much the same manner that the *blasonneurs* constructed the woman of their desires.

Macrin's portrait of Gelonis, although doting, leaves us with little impression of her as an individual personality. In the same way that the female limbs of the *blasons* may only move to serve the interests of the *blasonneur*, Gelonis' actions are all related in some way to the poet's needs. Gelonis is allowed no voice of her own, and may only be heard uttering a rather sensual murmuring ('ton murmure imprégné de miel Cécropien'), or at best, speaking, not words of her own, but those her husband desires to hear:

Ce beau jour, quand viendra-t-il, ô Gélonis, où, d'une voix  
câline, tu me chuchoteras, tendrement blottie dans mes bras:  
'Quel plaisir mon cher mari que tu reviennes sain et sauf te  
consoler ici avec moi, dans le bonheur d'une paix tranquille,  
des ennuis et des dures peines que tu as subis pendant près de

quinze ans, quand tu suivais le Roi et ses courses vagabondes!  
(E.9).

Here, we are back to the puppet-like figures, peopling the world of the emblem book. Gelonis' speech points to another facet of her role in Macrin's poetry, as personification of domestic happiness. Indeed, Macrin's love for Gelonis consists of strangely contrasting elements. Some poems illustrate the poet's unquenchable passion, while others play down the theme of the erotic, as Gelonis becomes representative of domestic comfort. It is particularly when Macrin falls ill that he longs for his wife to nurse him:

Si mon épouse maintenant était avec moi, je guérirais; je n'aurais pas à déplorer la longueur des nuits; elle arrangerait l'oreiller sous ma tête, dresserait mon lit; avec un léger éventail, elle rafraîchirait maintenant mes membres brûlants. Elle me servirait des aliments choisis, débordant pour moi de soins, elle préparerait ma potion diluée dans de l'eau tiède; par son seul aspect, elle me soulagerait de toutes les douleurs dont, languissant, je souffre (E.16).

As Berriot-Salvadore comments, the role of wife as doctor or healer seems to have been a common one, although only within the home:

Noble dame ou simple bourgeoise, la femme doit être 'medecine' de son mari, c'est-à-dire une infirmière capable de préparer un remède, de panser une plaie. Le terme donc ne recouvre pas seulement une qualité morale mais bien une fonction sociale, même s'il ne traduit pas l'exercice d'un métier.<sup>14</sup>

As will be seen in Section 2 of this chapter, the image of Gelonis as symbolizing comfort and warmth reveals a striking contrast with *Les Quinze Joies de Mariage*, where husbands frequently retire to bed cold, wet, and with an empty stomach. It is at this point that a reason for Gelonis' physical absence may be put forward. As the model of wifely perfection, it is hardly surprising that Gelonis remains safely hidden from the gaze of the reader, within the confines of the household. If Gelonis appears to us as a rather hazy figure, teasingly glimpsed, but never fully revealed, this is surely because Macrin prefers to mask the real Gelonis with a fictitious character. One notable feature of both collections of poems is the poet's deliberate dismissal of chronological order in the narration of their love. The reader is constantly moved backwards and forwards through time, striving to piece together the disordered sequence of events. Moreover, to break our impression of coherence even further, Macrin intersperses poems addressed to his friends and relatives amongst the more specifically personal ones. The result of such disorder is to distance the reader from Gelonis, who remains rather elusive, a spectre of her real self. The impression of Gelonis as absent may also be attributed to the conventional nature of the description of her physical

appearance. Her pure whiteness and golden hair evoke a rather ethereal and intangible Botticelli-like figure:

O ma belle, plus blanche que les cygnes de Lydie, que l'ivoire  
de Gétulie et les perles de l'Inde, toi qui surpasses le lait, les  
neiges Sithoniennes, le marbre de Paros et les blanches roses,  
le lis printanier et le troène printanier (C.II.11).

Gelonis is portrayed both as the poet's own cherished wife and as a depersonalized character, set in the mould of the universal female. The picture of Gelonis therefore oscillates between the consciously literary and the intimately private. Through this mixture of the traditional and the personal, Gelonis emerges as a mysterious half-presence, constantly eluding the grasp of the reader.

Macrin's poetry reveals the very clearly defined areas of work-space for each of the sexes. The poet is never pictured at home, but is forever travelling in the public world of the court. Gelonis, on the contrary, obediently awaits the return of her husband, occupying herself with typical feminine tasks. As a means of measuring his wife's fidelity, Macrin frequently makes reference to mythological women renowned for unshakeable devotion to their husbands. Gelonis is compared with Oenone, Evadne and, in particular, with Penelope. Constructing a deliberate parallel with Penelope, in numerous poems, Macrin depicts Gelonis spinning and embroidering to fill the time of his absence. The myth is drawn on so extensively that it ceases to be solely decorative, for Gelonis actually seems to become the mythological character herself:

Toi, cependant, ferme dans ta résolution sacrée, tu attends mon  
prompt retour, et la quenouille, les fins travaux Minerviens  
allègent l'ennui de ton coeur affligé....Ainsi, malgré la fuite de  
tant d'années, Pénélope pourtant attendait encore le héros  
d'Ithaque et, en défilant sa tapisserie, trompait les prétendants  
Dulchiens (E.12).

At times, carried away by his love, Macrin boldly declares Gelonis' needlework to be far superior to that of any figure from the past:

... par des broderies aux couleurs variées, dessines-tu des dieux  
et des hommes, avec beaucoup plus d'art et de goût que la  
blonde Pallas et que la Lydienne Arachné (E.11).

While Macrin strives to secure his wife's immortality through the medium of poetry, Gelonis is urged to embroider the story of their love on a cover for the marital bed. Thus, we see that the only mode of expression available to her is through image rather than speech. In other words, Gelonis may express herself only by means of an inherently feminine talent:



Epouse de ton compatriote, toi à qui Tritonis accorda le don de broder, d'une aiguille délicate, et de reproduire en couleurs variées, sur le tapis de Barbarie, fleurs et visages humains, avec une science à rendre jalouses les jeunes Phrygiennes et les adroites ouvrières du Nil... viendra-t-il le temps où tu l'emploieras à tisser un couvre-lit de nos amours, sous les auspices de l'enfant ardent qui sans cesse de sa torche boute-feu, brûle dieux comme mortels et les range, le cruel, sous d'inflexibles lois? (C.I.28).

Although Gelonis is not encouraged to express herself in articulate language, Macrin evidently hoped his wife would acquire some knowledge of Latin. In C.I.6, the poet mentions how he has sent books in Latin to his wife, and recommended that her brother act as tutor. However, Gelonis's acquisition of the principles of Latin is only made possible in order to enable her to read her husband's compositions and not simply for her own enjoyment. In this way, Gelonis may be compared with Castiglione's 'dame de palais', whose learning serves above all to facilitate her appreciation of male talent. Paradoxically, aphasic herself, Gelonis provides the immediate inspiration for a host of highly erudite, Latin verses. This is, of course, the role all women are expected to fulfil; eliciting speech from others rather than contributing themselves. However, it is difficult not to miss the ironical twist brought about by a woman serving as a catalyst for what may be termed as a particularly élitist and masculine form of writing.

Very occasionally, we move outside the poet's gilded world of fantasy, to glimpse a more real world plagued with doubt and jealousy. As soon as Macrin's fears grip him, the atmosphere of exoticism is broken, and his language becomes markedly pedestrian. Macrin's main concern at such times is that, in his absence, Gelonis has not disobediently strayed outside the parameters of the accepted feminine domain:

Que fais-tu, depuis que je t'ai quittée? Cherches-tu à tromper ton ennui par un labeur assidu: tantôt, en maniant la laine et le fuseau suspendu, assise au milieu de tes servantes, privées de sommeil, prolonges-tu tes veillées tard dans la nuit?... Ou bien, ne te ressemblant plus, vas-tu danser parmi de volages filles, hélas! tout à fait insoucieuse de moi, Gélonis? (E.11).

During moments of despair, Gelonis ceases to surpass her mythological counterpart and is no longer able to rival Penelope's fidelity:

Que de saisons Pénélope, assiégée de prétentieux prétendants, put attendre son mari absent! Et toi, un simple intervalle d'un an suffit à te démoraliser et à t'abatre (C.II.4).

In bursts of jealousy, Macrin severely reproaches Gelonis for wearing perfume or striving to embellish her appearance by means of artifice:

Mais toi qui es belle, toi qui es promise depuis longtemps,  
pourquoi t'intéresser à de si frivoles bagatelles? (C.I.22).

Exotic scent may, of course, only perfume the poet's dream-world, having no place in the real world of love. However, passages of doubt and anxiety are rare and the general tone of Macrin's poetry is one of the joy and laughter suggested by his choice of the name Gelonis.

Dependent solely upon the moods of the poet, the face of Gelonis is forever changing. In Macrin's poetry, she has no existence other than as an extension of the poet's imagination. Moulded by his desires into a series of ideal feminine figures, Gelonis appears to us variously as nurse-maid, passionate lover, faithful wife, muse, silent admirer of male art, or skilful seamstress. Manipulated by a poet desirous of a wife whose actions are motivated solely by his own needs, Gelonis has no reality whatsoever. Macrin's portrait of marriage as harmonious is, in one sense, illusory, existing principally as an imagined, and therefore idealized union. In fact, much like the writer of the courtesy book, Macrin, in his promotion of the institution of matrimony, does little more than reinforce the traditional roles of the sexes. The figure of Gelonis, made public by her husband's verses, can only be a fictional character created from the poet's imagination. The real Gelonis remains, as the good wife should do, safely hidden within the confines of the house.

To contrast this favourable portrait of marriage, I wish, in the following section of this chapter, to move onto the negative image of matrimony which emerges from the highly popular marriage satire.

2. Husbands and Harlots

The anonymous *Les Quinze Joies de Mariage*, probably composed in the first half of the fifteenth century, represents just one link in a long tradition of satirical pieces attacking the institution of matrimony.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the preceding portraits of ideal wives, drawn by two of the main humanists of the period, the wanton wife remains a figure of the popular genres, rarely featuring in works of more serious conception. Separating marriage satires from the writings of the *Querelle des Femmes* is, in one sense, rather a false task, for the themes of misogamy and misogyny are intertwined to the point of being almost inseparable. Therefore, much of what has already been discussed in Chapter 2, Section 1 will be relevant also for the marriage satire. As a focus for this section, I have chosen to concentrate my attention in particular on the *XV Joies*, which, while clearly conforming to the satirical tradition, at the same time, seems to stand on a plane above both the works it draws on, and those it influences.<sup>16</sup> Much in the same way that the *Roman de la Rose* was seen to be central to the debate on women's relative merits, the *XV Joies* becomes the touchstone for writers of marriage satire and is frequently quoted in their works. Indeed, the influence of the *XV Joies* is so great, that authors of some works, such as the *Sermon nouveau et fort joyeux*, openly acknowledge their debt to the text:

Extraict d'ung livre bien dicté,  
Nommé *les Joyes de mariage*  
(*Sermon nouveau*, p.5).

In Chapter 2, the *Querelle des Femmes* was defined as an exclusively masculine debate, texts being written principally by and for men. The popular marriage satire provides no exception to this rule, for, to my knowledge, no work of this ilk has ever been composed by a woman writer. Considering that the aim of most satirical writers is to raise laughter, it is no great surprise to find women refusing to laugh when they find themselves to be the butt of the joke. The themes of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century marriage satire are scarcely original and may be traced back at least as far as works such as Theophrastus' *Aureolus*, or Juvenal's Satire VI.<sup>17</sup> As with the *Querelle des Femmes*, the texts to be studied in this section display little variation from one work to the next; all having recourse to the same commonplace themes. While exploring in detail some of these recurrent ideas, I hope to highlight the gulf which lies between the portrait of the wife in the marriage satire and the picture of her which emerged from the study of the courtesy book.

The Household

The first impression to strike readers who embark on an examination of the typical marriage satire is likely to be that they have been thrust into an upside-down universe, where there is a complete reversal of traditionally accepted values. In Chapter 1, the Renaissance household was described as being organized into a hierarchy based on power, with God situated at the top of the ladder. In the majority of marriage satires, the characters exist in a God-less world, where Christian precepts have no place. The church, no longer a symbol of Christian faith, becomes a convenient location for the illicit rendezvous of adulterous lovers. Within the family itself, the husband is demoted from his supposedly unequivocal position as omnipotent head; his rights being usurped by an unusually self-confident wife. The husband of the satirical work always lives in the shadow of his spouse. Consequently, the husband's voice loses its authority, while only his wife's commands receive attention from other members of the household:

Et sachez: quelque chose que le bon home commande, les  
serviteurs n'en feront rien, car ilz sont touz a la poste de la  
dame (*XV Joies*, p.30).

The husband's position of inferiority is made especially apparent through the use of abundant animal imagery to depict his submissive behaviour. In the *XV Joies* alone, the author compares him with a series of animals including a donkey, horse, fish, cockerel, dog and bird. In the marriage satire, animal imagery tends to be used, not to illustrate unrestrainable behaviour (as in the emblems), but to present an image of man as dehumanized to the point where he offers no more resistance to his fate:

Comme ung cheval recreu qui ne fait compte de l'esperon ne de  
chouse que l'en lui face (*XV Joies*, p.28).

In the third 'joie de mariage', the author presents us with an amusing account of a wife's efforts 'to tame' her husband:

Veez cy mes commeres qui scevent bien que, quant je fu  
mariee a mon mary, l'en disoit qu'il estoit si divers qu'il me  
tueroit. Mes, par Dieu, ma commere, il est bien dompté, Dieu  
mercy, car il ameroit mieulx s'etre rompu ung bratz que avoir  
pensé a me faire ou dire desplaisir. Il est bien vroy que au  
commaincement, il cuida commencer ung maniere de parler et  
de faire, mais, par le sacrement Dieu, je l'en gardé bien et  
respondy bien et prins le frain aux dens.... Dieu mercy, j'ay tant  
fait que je puis dire ou faire ce que je veil, car la darraine  
parolle me demoura, soit tort ou droit. Mais il n'est jeu que aux  
joueux et n'y a que faire, car, m'amie, je vous jure qu'il n'est

home si enragé que sa femme ne face franc et debonnaire, si elle est telle que elle ait entendement (*XV Joies*, p.20).

Throughout the *XV Joies*, the husband emerges, not only as a docile, obedient animal, but also, more frequently, as the victim of traps set up expressly to ensnare him. The snare, representative of marriage, may be a device to catch birds (see *XV Joies*, p.78). However, the image which recurs the most frequently in the *XV Joies* is that of the fish net ('la nasse'), which serves to illustrate the restrictive nature of marriage. The image is not an original one and may be traced back to the *Roman de la Rose*, where it is used to express the confines of religious orders.<sup>18</sup> Both Matheolus and Deschamps make fleeting reference to this theme, now associating it with marriage rather than religion.<sup>19</sup> However, neither of these authors develops the theme as thoroughly as the author of the *XV Joies*. The image of the fish, enticed into the net in order to share the bait with the other fish, occurs throughout the work, serving as a unifying theme in what may otherwise be described as a rather disjointed narrative. In the majority of texts, the idea of choice disappears completely, so that marriage now becomes as inevitable for the man as for the woman. The satirists play on this gloomy destiny by depicting the state of matrimony in terms of a hell, an imprisonment or a self-imposed slavery:

On voit clerement hault et bas  
Que c'est ung droit enfer terrestre  
(Ivry, p.187).

[ung homme] trouve l'entree d'une estroicte chartre  
douleureuse et plaine de plours et se boute dedans; et quant il  
est liens enclos, on lui ferme la porte, qui est de fer fermant a  
grosses barres, et est si estroictement tenu que jamés pour  
nulles prieres ne avoir ne peut saillir (*XV Joies*, p.1).

Dont je voy que par mariage  
Suis assés en plus grant servage  
Que serf, qui se puet racheter  
(Matheolus, p.8).

At one point in *Les XV Joies*, the husband is compared with a cockerel which spends its day gathering grain that it feeds directly to the idle hen, whose only concerns are 'de menger et de caqueter et se tenir bien aise' (p.58). This comparison indicates one of the major themes of the marriage satire, that is, the reversal of the traditional sex roles. The satirical work portrays the wife as incessantly coming and going, rarely enclosed as the treatise writers envisaged:

Il n'y a ne frein ne chevestre  
Qui ja la peüst retenir.  
Tousjours veult aler et venir;  
Jamais ne la tendroit close hom

Ne en chambre ne en maison.  
Par tous lieux veult estre veüe  
(Matheolus, p.71).

Continually striving to move outside the limits of the female work-space, the wife will always find an excuse to leave the house, whether it is for 'dances', 'festes', 'noces', 'assemblies', 'pelerinages', or simply to go to church. In Chapter 1, I discussed how confinement of women to the house is linked with the desire for preservation of chastity. Fears for female purity in the public world are seen to be well-founded, for, in the marriage satire, a woman's sole motive for leaving her house, is to encounter her lover: 'pour ce qu'ilz ne povent pas bien faire a leur guise en leurs mesons' (*XV Joies*, p.67). The husband, who believes he has solved the situation by escorting his wife into the public domain, is soon proved wrong. The punishment for depriving a woman of her full freedom is a harsh one, as is seen in the eighth *Joie*, where a husband accompanies his wife on a pilgrimage. By means of the repetition of the word 'maintenant', the author cleverly conveys the everlasting list of tiresome tasks inflicted on the husband who dares trouble his wife with his unwanted presence:

Maintenant elle dit qu'elle a ung estref trop long et l'autre trop court, maintenant lui fault son mantel, maintenant la lesse, puis dit que le cheval trote trop dur et en est malade; maintenant elle descent, et puis la fault remonter pour passer ung pont ou ung mauvés chemin, maintenant elle ne peut menger et si convient que le bon homme, qui a plus troté que ung chien, trote par my la ville a lui querir ce qu'elle demande (*XV Joies*, p.69).

Having inverted the notion of gender-related space, the satirist will frequently bring the wife back into the household and then proceed to mock this situation. Many scenes of the *XV Joies* picture the wife inside the house, while the husband is outside conducting business in outlying villages. However, this inside/outside theme becomes a question more of physical comfort than of freedom. The woman seems to take advantage of her confinement within the house to keep warm by the fire, eat well and receive her lovers. As M. Santucci remarks, the husband does not enjoy the same climatic conditions as his wife:

L'homme et la femme ne bénéficient pas des mêmes conditions climatiques. Tandis que la femme est à l'abri, l'homme... connaît souvent la pluie, le vent, le froid.<sup>20</sup>

For the husband, rather than symbolizing freedom, the outside world comes to represent suffering and torment:

[le mari] a l'aventure est bien moillé, et est mal monté, qui avient souvent, et a l'aventure est tout boueux, pour ce que son cheval est choist en ung mauvés chemin; et a l'aventure le bon homme ne mengea de tout le jour (*XV Joies*, p.21).

Moreover, the husband is frequently obliged to leave the house in order to run some trivial errand for his wife, who plays on her restriction within the paramaters of the female domain, as an excuse for inactivity. Many of the scenes of the *XV Joies* seem to take place at night and within the confines of the house. This results in a claustrophobic atmosphere which pervades the work, creating the impression that the characters are quite literally enclosed in a 'nasse'.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, one critic has appropriately described the *XV Joies* as 'a sort of nuptial *Huis Clos* based on the premise "l'enfer, c'est le mariage"'.<sup>22</sup> In the ninth *Joie*, we witness another reversal of the normal male/female roles. A husband is seen to lose his access to the outside world, when his family conspires against him by forcibly imprisoning him within the house. Such confinement inevitably entails the husband's movement across into the silent private world usually inhabited only by the obedient wife:

... concluent ensemble que home du monde ne parlera plus  
avecques lui.... Ilz s'en vont et dient a chacun que le  
proudomme est tourné en enfance, et travaille le filz a faire  
mettre le bon homme en tutelle, et luy font acroire qu'il a perdu  
le sens et le memoire, combien qu'il est auxi sage qu'il fut  
onques (*XV Joies*, pp.75-76).

Also treating the subject of the male/female domains, the author of *La Resolution d'Amours* adds an amusing twist to the theme, as he bemoans the difficulty of actually getting a wife out of one's house, once she has been let in. The scarcely veiled reference is, of course, to the difficulties of obtaining a divorce at this particular period in time:

C'est une espèce demonique  
Que nul ne peut de sa maison  
Par puissance michaélique  
Expulser que par oraison  
Et par jeusne....  
(*La Resolution*, pp.321-22).

As will be seen below, in the marriage satire, the household may become a domain which is so implicitly female that the husband's presence is treated with indifference or, in the worst situations, with hostility.

In this topsyturvy world where gender no longer defines the roles played by both male and female, it is of no great surprise to discover the subservient husband taking over the household tasks: 'le pouvre homme porte toute la charge de la meson' (*XV Joies*, p.18). The *XV Joies* pictures the wife requesting her domesticated husband to cook the most unusual delicacies for her (e.g. a 'couleis de chappon au sucre', p.21), while he must be content with meagre left-overs. In a world where order has been replaced by instability, the assignment of virtues to each of the sexes is overturned. As a consequence, the husband acquires

traditionally feminine virtues such as obedience, patience, and care, as is illustrated in the first *Joie*:

Après qu'elle sera couchee, le proudomme escouterà si elle dort  
et avisera si elle a les braz bien couvers et la couvrera s'il est  
mestier (*XV Joies*, p.10).

Alternatively, in some marriage satires, the wife retains her domestic role, but cunningly uses her position to torment her husband:

S'il veult pois, elle fait porée  
De raves ou de cicorée;  
S'il veult poisson, char luy apreste  
(Matheolus, p.39).

#### The Garrulous Wife

The most salient feature of the wife, in a typical marriage satire, is surely her loquacity. As might be expected, her speech is always of the worst kind, being either gossip or manipulative lies. One of the main characteristics of the *XV Joies* is the introduction of passages of dialogue which help to bring alive the various scenes of the work. The text, although prose fiction, has a notable resemblance with the dramatic form. The theatrical element is apparent in the long extended passages of dialogue, the vocabulary of which has been assimilated to the everyday language of the period.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the characters of the *XV Joies* are stock figures, unnamed types, such as 'le jeune homme', who reappear from one sketch to the next. This idea of theatre (or farce, to be more precise) is also enforced through repeated references to characters as play-acting:

Et a l'aventure, celle qui parle doit avoir une robe ou autres  
joyaux pour jouer bien le personnage (*XV Joies*, p.15).

As soon as a male character appears in the work, women will always begin to act and become deceitful. The eleventh *Joie* focuses on a situation where a naïve girl, who has inadvertently become pregnant, must find a hasty solution in order to save her reputation. It is, in fact, her mother who undertakes the task of tricking an impressionable young man into marrying her daughter. The mother is pictured in the position of a 'stage director', teaching her daughter how to perform a role, then surveying the scene as a kind of prompter:

Et a l'aventure la dame lui a fait signe que elle se taise, pour ce  
que elle a paour que elle ne joue pas bien son personnage (*XV Joies*, p.86).



In preparation for her wedding night, the daughter has also been carefully briefed about a convincing manner in which to feign virginity:

... et lui a bien aprins la dame que, quant elle sentira faulser la piece, qu'elle giete ung cry d'alaine suppireux auxi come une personne qui se met a coup tout nu en leaue froide jusques aux mamelles et ne l'a pas acoustumé (*XV Joies*, p.89).

The lie becomes an essential part of everyday life for each wife in the *XV Joies*. Indeed, as Adrienne Rich states more than five hundred years later: 'Women have been forced to lie, for survival, to men'.<sup>24</sup> *Les XV Joies* emerges as a kind of web of female deceit, where the husband 'sera servy de mensonges' (p.48). Phrases such as 'Ainxin se contient la dame combien qu'elle pense bien le contraire' (*XV Joies*, p.10) are rife in the work, illustrating the ambivalent nature of feminine speech. A wife, who has failed to persuade through lies, will turn to another strategy and try her luck with a show of tears. A close examination of the *XV Joies* reveals that not one single phrase spoken by a female to a male character is ever truthful. In contrast, the many all-female conversations are characterized by their ring of simple sincerity. In Chapter 4, it will be seen that Héli-senne de Crenne's *Les Angoysses douloureuses* also underlines the use of the lie as a recurrent mode of conversation between the female protagonist and all other male characters. A revealing contrast arises between Héli-senne's 'sincere' internal monologue and her use of falsehoods in all passages of direct speech. The female speaker of the marriage satire is a manipulative one. In much of her discourse with men she succeeds, by a variety of techniques, in manoeuvring the conversation round so that it is finally the husband who persuades her to do something she actually wished to do in the first-place. By initially refusing to speak ('je ne vous en diroy ja rien, car vous ne faites conte de chose que je vous dye', p.7), the wife encourages her husband to adopt the unusual role of eliciting female speech. Once the wife has actually been implored to speak, she is now safe to make any comment or request she desires: 'Puis qu'il vous plect, je le vous diroy' (*XV Joies*, p.7). Playing a role and lying constitute two of the main character traits of the wife of the marriage satire. She may, therefore, be said to have doubly abused the proposed ideal role of the married woman as silent, but honest. It would seem that, within one household, there is no room for two dominant speakers. Hence, when a wife is garrulous, her husband falls silent:

La dame ... tence et dit parolles de travers, cuisantes, qui toujours chargent le pouvre home, qui ne sonne mot (*XV Joies*, p.30).

In Chapter 1, I noted that, according to Erasmus, the acceptable manner in which a woman was to speak was by expressing herself with her husband's voice. In the *XV Joies*, the

husband becomes aphasic; his speech (or lack of it), being indicative of his state of dependency:

... et quant aucun a affaire avecques lui, il dit: 'J'en parleroy a ma femme ou a la dame de nostre meson', et si el vieult, il sera, si el ne vieult, il n'en sera riens (*XV Joies*, p.90).

### Sexual Ruses

In a universe where all the values prescribed by courtesy literature are deliberately reversed, female chastity is, not surprisingly, the first precept to be flouted. The wife of a typical marriage satire is represented as insatiably lustful, never content with the attentions of her husband alone. At the slightest provocation, the wife will embark on an adulterous relationship, for the lover's talents are inevitably superior to the husband's. Moreover, outside the conjugal bed, the wife appears to be released from all sexual inhibition:

Et sachez qu'elle fait a son amy cent chouses et moustre des secretz d'amours et fait pluseurs petites merencolies quelle n'ouserait faire ne monstrier a son mary (*XV Joies*, p.35).

After such pleasure, the husband's caresses seem distinctly inferior:

Après lesquelx plaisirs la dame prent autant de plesir en l'esbat de son mary come ung tasters de vins d'un petit rippopé après ung bon ypocras ou pineau (*XV Joies*, p.36).

As a means of expressing her distaste at suffering her husband's amorous pursuit, the wife becomes an expert at feigning frigidity:

La dame... le lesse faire et se tient pesamment et ne se aide point ne ne se hobe ne que une pierre (*XV Joies*, p.38).

However, if the wife is hoping for a favour from her husband, her behaviour will adapt accordingly:

Lors fait ses plaisirs et la damme se rent assés agile et abille (*XV Joies*, pp.39-40).

Forever hankering after the latest fashion in clothes, the wife generally finds her husband to be most easily manipulated when he is in the hope of satisfying his physical desires in bed:

Lors regarde lieu et temps et heure de parler de sa matere a son mary, et volentiers elles devroient parler de leurs choses

especialles la ou leurs maris sont plus subgitz et doivent estre plus enclins pour octrier, c'est au lit (*XV Joies*, p.7).

It is at moments such as these, that the wife's skills in role playing come into operation:

Se l'omme la veult approuchier,  
Elle luy deffent le touchier,  
Arrier se trait, le dos luy tourne,  
Et pleure comme triste et mourne;  
Semblant fait que soit moult troublée  
(Matheolus, p.77).

The most usual strategy of persuasion for a wife desiring new clothes lies in black-mailing her husband by means of unfavourable comparisons of her own wardrobe with those of her neighbours. A common technique of the satirists is to name item after item of clothing the wife requires, piling up lists of words in Rabelaisian fashion. The comic effect is further heightened by the author's choice of specialized vocabulary, referring to the strangest items of women's clothing:

Et si dira: 'Encor je vueil  
Une fustaine, monseigneur,  
Et me fault un mantel greigneur  
Que je n'ay, a droit fons de cuve;  
Et si vous di bien que ma huve  
Est vielle et de pouvre fasson:  
Je sçay tel femme de masson,  
Qui n'est pas a moy comparable,  
Qui meilleur l'a et plus coustable  
IIII fois que la mienne n'est  
(Deschamps, p.44).

The wife of the satirical tradition is a spendthrift and the theme of money commonly forms a leitmotif. Beginning with the astronomical expense that the wedding celebrations entail, the husband is destined to a lifetime of hardship, as an amusing portrait in the fourth *Joie* demonstrates:

Il a unes botes qui ont bien deux ou trois ans, et ont tant de foiz esté reppareillees par le bas qu'elles sont courtes d'un pié et sans faczon, car ce qui souloit estre au genoil est maintenant au milieu de la jambe; et a ungs esperons du temps passé du roy Clotaire (*XV Joies*, p.28).

The husband who fails to provide sufficient pecuniary support must suffer the humiliation of being cuckolded. Conversely, an adulterous husband would be something of an anomaly, for the author of the *XV Joies* goes as far as endowing the husband with the virtues of chastity and fidelity.

The widow frequently features as a victim of particularly embittered satirical attacks. In contrast to the exalted picture of widowhood viewed in the courtesy book, where an intensification of moral values was regarded as appropriate, satire highlights the unbridled behaviour of the newly 'released' widow:

Quant le mari gist en la biere,  
La femme et avant et arriere  
Pense tousjours en son courage  
De ravoit autre a mariage.  
C'est coustume, quant elle pleure;  
Après trois jours n'attend que l'eure  
(Matheolus, p.69).

The character of the fickle widow is exemplified by a picturesque anecdote found in both the *Lamentations* and the *Miroir de Mariage*. A young inconsolable widow weeps over her dead husband's tomb. Nearby, a knight guards a robber whose place on the gibbet he will be condemned to take, should he let the man escape. The robber's disappearance provokes an encounter between the widow and the knight, which results in the woman finding a rather macabre solution to his predicament. She hurriedly exhumes the corpse of her husband, mutilates it until any features are unidentifiable, and hangs it in the place of the fugitive robber. The motivating force behind such an action is described as lying in the widow's rekindled desire to have a new marriage partner. The episode concludes with a cynical aside from the disillusioned author:

Or ne sçay je s'il fist que saige:  
Autant pot il de soy attendre  
Com du premier qu'elle fist pandre  
(Deschamps, p.133).

### 'The Gossips'

Pregnancy is another cherished theme of the satirical genre. If the wife has not already subjugated her husband, she may now take advantage of her condition to do so: 'Femme grosse a loy de tout dire' (*Sermon nouveau*, p.13). The husband has no choice, but to become totally at her mercy, in the role of a servant obeying his mistress:

Il court et trote partout pour trouver a la dame ce qui lui plaist;  
et s'il chiet a la dame une espille, il l'amassera (XV *Joies*, p.18).

The actual birth brings the arrival of numerous women essential for the wife's well-being:

Quand vient à l'enfant recevoir,  
Il faut la sage-femme avoir

Et des commères un grand tas;  
L'une viendra au cas pourvoir;  
L'autre n'y viendra que pour veoir  
(*Tenebres de Mariage*, p.23).

While the portrait of the husband presents us with a solitary character, the same cannot be said for the wife, who is constantly surrounded by other women: family, friends, neighbours, chambermaids and wet nurses. Adrian Wilson's article, 'The Ceremony of Childbirth and its Interpretation', although focusing on seventeenth-century mothers in England, indicates that the scenes of childbirth such as those in the *XV Joies* are part of a wide-spread and long-standing tradition.<sup>25</sup> Wilson discusses how childbirth was a social occasion for women. Apparently, the pregnant mother would invite a group of female friends, relatives and neighbours to be present at the birth itself. At the moment of the birth, the women would all withdraw into a dark, closed room:

What was happening in these rapid preparations was that the mother was moving into a different social space: away from the world of men (centrally, her husband) and into the world of women. It was here, within the collective culture of women, that birth belonged.<sup>26</sup>

Wilson notes that the women invited to attend the birth were known as the 'gossips', from which the present word 'gossip' evolved (first being a male description of what women did when at these gatherings).<sup>27</sup> Both during and after the birth, the gossips drank a special drink known as the 'caudle', and would often partake in an all-female feast. The third *Joie* corresponds very closely with Wilson's descriptions, where we witness a group of women as wine-drinking, feasting and gossiping together, while the husband silently lurks in the background, ready to replenish empty barrels:

Lors les commeres entrent. Elles desjunent, elles dignent, elles menjent a raassie: maintenant boivent au lit de la commere, maintenant a la cuve, et confondent des biens et du vin plus qu'il n'en entreroit en une bote (*XV Joies*, p.26).

After the delivery of the child, a period of 'lying-in' was habitual.<sup>28</sup> During this time, the husband was called upon to carry out some of the traditionally feminine tasks and was denied his normal conjugal rights:

Thus, the ceremony of childbirth inverted the normal pattern of conjugal relations: the wife's bodily energies and sexuality now, for the space of 'the month', belonged to her; what marriage had taken away from her, the ceremony of childbirth temporarily restored. This makes intelligible the fact that the ritual was a collective female event. The presence of other women may have served to police the lying-in - to ensure that the husband respected the norms.<sup>29</sup>

The husband in the third *Joie* is ruined financially, by his wife's lavish entertaining, during the period of lying-in. However, his tentative suggestion that she should finally get up is received with a burst of anger:

Il a ja XV jours que vous estez acouchee. M'amie, il fault regarder au moins perdre, car les despens sont grans. - Ha a, fait la dame, mauldite soit l'eure que je fu oncques nee et que je ne avorté mon enfant! (XV *Joies*, pp.22-23).

The all-female group, gathered for a childbirth, or some other social event, will immediately conspire against the male world, represented by the husband. If a husband dares mistreat his wife, he finds himself under attack from a kind of female mafia, the leader of which is invariably his mother-in-law. The popular work, *Les Evangiles des Quenouilles*, provides a perfect illustration of this female conspiracy theme.<sup>30</sup> The work consists of a group of aged women meeting each evening for six nights, in order to relate a series of what may be termed as old wives' tales. The women gather together, bringing with them the tools of their trade:

Toutes apportèrent leurs quenouilles, lin, fuiseaux, estandars, happles, et toutes agoubilles servans à leur art (*Evangiles*, p.13).

In this work, as in others, criticism of husbands appears as the major topic of conversation between the women. Only one man is permitted entry to this ritualistic storytelling. However, his presence is not voluntary. Having inadvertently interrupted their assembly, the defenceless man is retained in order to serve as scribe. In an ironical twist, the male's creative talents are denied him, as he becomes the writing hand for a feminine language. Thus, the male must fall silent, while being subjected to six long evenings of women's speech. Isolated from other men, the scribe can no longer enjoy the common joke made about women's gossip:

Il me desplaisoit moult que compaignie d'aucun homme ne povoie avoir pour rire: car certes, la manière qu'elles tenoient estoit moult estrange (*Evangiles*, p.68).

At the end of each evening, the scribe's services have been used so much that he can barely remain awake. However, any furtive attempt to slip out before the end of proceedings is firmly prevented:

Quant je vey ceste confusion, je ploiy mon papier, estouppay et serray mon escriptoire, remis ma plume en mon coffin, et me levay en me cuidant embler d'elles; mais tantost je fus apperceus d'aucunes d'elles, qui me retiendrent à toute force (*Evangiles*, pp.82-83).

*Les XV Joies*

Per Nykrog describes *Les XV Joies* as deserving a place in the 'Hall of Fame for successful literary freaks'.<sup>31</sup> The success of the author of the *XV Joies* as satirist may be partly accountable to his detached attitude towards his subject: 'posé là en observateur non engagé devant son aquarium'.<sup>32</sup> Many of the other satirists present themselves as already caught in the 'nasse' and therefore personally embittered (e.g. Matheolus). The author of *Les XV Joies* is not married and can therefore enjoy the privileged position as an outsider: 'me suis delicté, en les regardant noer en la nasse' (*XV Joies*, p.5). Thus, a certain feeling of superiority characterizes the narrator's attitude, especially apparent in his bitingly sarcastic asides. One example of this sarcasm occurs at the beginning of the third *Joie*, when we learn that a newly wed wife is pregnant. Unable to resist commenting on this occurrence, the author rather gleefully adds 'à l'aventure ne sera pas de son mari' (*XV Joies*, p.18). This feeling of pleasure at witnessing another's discomfort will inevitably also be experienced by the readers of *Les XV Joies*, who, as a consequence, will criticize the institution of matrimony. The author never actually condemns marriage, but what really seems to enrage him is the husband's blind acceptance, or even enjoyment, of this imprisonment:

Tiennent à joies, plaisances et felicités et ne croient nuelles  
autres joies estre pareilles, mais selon tout entendement celles  
XV joies de mariage sont à mon avis les plus grans tourmens,  
douleurs, tristesses et maleurtez qui soient en terre (*XV Joies*,  
p.4).

The author's criticism of the complacent husband creates something of an ambiguity for the reader, who is expecting to find a work which maligns the female sex. Indeed, it seems possible that the author is doing no more than paying lip service to commonplace themes in order to comment on marriage in a manner not found in his sources:

*Les Quinze Joies de Mariage* s'insèrent dans un courant antimatrimonial mais, contrairement à beaucoup d'autres ouvrages de cette veine, elles ne débouchent ni sur une condamnation sans appel du mariage ni sur une satire sans nuance de la femme.<sup>33</sup>

The author's rather ambiguous attitude is underlined in the conclusion, where he confidently claims that 'tout est à la louange des femmes' (*XV Joies*, p.115). Moreover, we are asked to believe that this very work was commissioned by women, but that if they are not satisfied, the author is only too willing to write another:

... car j'ay plus belle matiere de le faire que ce n'est, veu les grans tors et oppressions que les hommes font aux femmes (*XV Joies*, p.116).

How is the reader to interpret such an unexpected admission from the author? We may suspect that this is just another tongue-in-cheek comment, in the playful tone which pervades the whole text. It is, however, tempting to take the author at face value, for his conclusion is not totally out of keeping with the rest of the work which seems to attack the husband more than the wife.

Behind its traditionally satirical facade, the *XV Joies* seems to conceal a more profound discontentment, related to the actual nature of the 'nasse' which society imposes on the individual. From the ninth *Joie* onwards, the reader may detect a slight change in the author's attitude. The ritual phrase 'Ainxin vit en paine et douleur qu'il prent pour joies', is abandoned, as we enter a series of more serious problems related to matrimony. The author discusses the difficulty of obtaining a divorce, and the miserable life which ensues for those who do succeed:

Or est l'home, de quelque estat qu'il soit, gasté et affolé en ce monde, et la femme auxi. Ilz ne se povent plus marier ne l'un ne l'autre. Si ilz ont grans pocessions et sont de grant lieu, leur nom est perdu et mourront sans heritiers (*XV Joies*, p.81).

This more serious note may also be detected in the eleventh *Joie* which focuses on the pregnant girl, clearly representing her as a victim, by calling her 'ung jeune tendron' and 'l'enfanton' (*XV Joies*, p.84). The fourteenth *Joie* recounts the only case of a happy marriage, where the partners are: 'come deux coulombeaux' (*XV Joies*, p.99). However, in the author's gloomy vision of marriage, even this is destined to have a premature ending when the wife dies. Society will then force the widower back into the net where, this time, he will not find the same happiness:

... et travaillent pour le marier et le marient a une aultre qui a toutes condicions a la premiere contraires (*XV Joies*, p.100).

As Santucci comments, the author of the *XV Joies*, makes use of traditional anti-feminist themes in order to provide a new insight into the real problems of marriage at this period in time:

L'hostilité de l'auteur au mariage ne me paraît point la conséquence logique de son anti féminisme... mais l'antiféminisme devient un paravent qui masque ses audaces.<sup>34</sup>

The world of the marriage satire presents us with a complete reversal of the picture of the wife drawn by the writers of the courtesy book. Indeed, the woman of a typical satirical



work disobeys every single precept set out to form the ideal wife. In this way, she becomes the antithesis of the perfect wife, the incarnation of the treatise writers' worst fears. However, the satirical work, in its own particular way, is also strangely instructive for the woman reader, with its portrait of the way a wife should not behave. Rather different from most satires, with *Les XV Joies de Mariage*, we are back to the idea of the hall of mirrors, discussed in my section on the *Querelle des Femmes*. Thus, caution is needed when studying the role of the wife in this work for, in spite of appearances, she does in fact emerge as superior to the somewhat characterless husband. Ultimately, however, the author of the *XV Joies* seems to wish to imply that both husband and wife are the helpless victims of an inflexible institution, symbolized by the recurrent motif of the fish net.

3. Reading the *Heptaméron*<sup>35</sup>

The Readers

The immense popularity of Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* may, no doubt, be attributed to its status as an outstanding monument of storytelling. However, while the actual narration of stories constitutes a major element of the work, it must not be forgotten that the *Heptaméron* is equally revealing about the act of listening, and therefore, reading. The ten storytellers, created by Marguerite, are assigned the dual role of both narrating the stories and then discussing them in a critical manner. This unusual situation, whereby reader response is given a place of prominence within the text itself, is made clear by Terence Cave's comment that in the *Heptaméron* 'a dialogue of readers has invaded the terrain of narrative'.<sup>36</sup>

To ensure that response to the tales will be varied, the author is careful, not only to introduce an equal number of readers of each sex, but also to vary their ages from the very young (Nomerfide), to the elderly (Géburon). Marguerite's attention to the selection of a group of diverse readers is underscored by a comparison with the narrators of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the model which inspired the structure of the *Heptaméron*. In the earlier text, the group consists of only three men and seven women, all of whom are of the same age:

Each was a friend, a neighbour, or a relative of the other six,  
none was older than twenty-seven or younger than eighteen,  
and all were intelligent, gently bred, fair to look upon, graceful  
in bearing, and charmingly unaffected.<sup>37</sup>

As a consequence, the reaction to the stories in the *Decameron* is limited and tends towards unanimity, whereas response in the *Heptaméron* is invariably characterized by disagreement and disharmony.<sup>38</sup> Boccaccio never expands on the reactions of his storytellers to the tales to which they are listening. In this way, their role as 'authors' becomes predominant, overshadowing the part played by them as readers. A brief look at one of the linking passages between stories may serve to highlight the distinct passivity of Boccaccio's readers whose interpretations may only be guessed at by the author:

The ladies heaved a sigh over the fair lady's several adventures:  
but who knows what their motives may have been? Perhaps  
some of them were sighing, not so much because they felt  
sorry for Alatiel, but because they longed to be married no less  
often than she was. However, leaving this question aside, when  
they had all finished laughing at Panfilo's final words, from  
which the queen assumed his tale to be finished, she turned to  
Elissa and enjoined her to continue the proceedings with a

story of her own. And being only too happy to oblige, Elissa began as follows (*Decameron*, p.191).

In the *Heptaméron*, the conversations following the stories assume a far more significant role, often lasting as long, or longer, than the actual story. Moreover, in Marguerite's work, reader response is intrinsically bound up with the actual choice of stories told. Where Boccaccio assigns a theme to be discussed by his storytellers each day, Marguerite allows for a more spontaneous linking of stories. The order of tales in the *Heptaméron* is set off by a kind of chain reaction, long ones deliberately followed by short, vulgar by refined, and so forth. One such link may be illustrated by a change over from Simontaut to Oisille:

Celui qui m'a donné sa voix a tant dit de mal des femmes par une histoire véritable d'une malheureuse, que je dois remémorer tous mes vieux ans pour en trouver une dont la vertu puisse démentir sa mauvaise opinion (p.56).

Marguerite intentionally seems to multiply the possible readings of her work, creating what may be termed as an open-ended text. Our position as readers, situated outside the text, seems to be made clear by the example of the 'fictional' readers. Marguerite's emphasis on the importance of reading as a catalyst for discussion serves to alert us to become active, rather than passive, readers of the *Heptaméron*. Guided as to the mode of reading to adopt, we are encouraged to continue the debate started for us already by Marguerite's readers. This substitution of the real reader for his/her fictional counterpart is facilitated by the fact that the *Heptaméron* draws no neat conclusions; passages of discussion always being suspended in mid-flow; questions raised, but never fully answered. However, the overriding impression of entering a multivocal debate, free from authorial prejudices, is misleading. Apparently absent from the pages of the *Heptaméron*, Marguerite, as author, is, of course, always present behind the masks of her ten readers. Thus, when joining the discussions of the *Heptaméron* tales, we must remember that they are, in fact, presided over by the invisible, but omnipotent figure of the author. The fleeting glimpse that we catch of the author herself, in the prologue to the whole work, reminds us that control of the narrative lies in her hands alone:

Ma fin n'est pas de vous déclarer la situation ni la vertu desdits bains, mais seulement de raconter ce qui sert à la matière que je veux écrire (p.39).

It is also interesting to discover that in several stories, the historical figure of Marguerite de Navarre makes an appearance in the plot. Significantly, her role is always as authoritative; her decisions having much influence on the ultimate destiny of certain characters.<sup>39</sup> The disappearance of the author, after the initial prologue, seems to be a narrative ploy, to urge the readers to forget that they have entered a fictional world. By presenting us with two

levels of fiction, the stories themselves and the following passages of dialogue, Marguerite cleverly produces the effect of verisimilitude in the conversations, which contrast with the consciously fictional stories. Such a ploy causes us to view Marguerite's narrators as set apart from fiction and, therefore, more easily identified with in their role as readers.

In the *Heptaméron*, women may be observed speaking with men on equal terms. Moreover, in this dialogue between the sexes, the voices of each side are seen as complementing each other, to produce a balanced discourse: 'Et faisait fort bon ouïr les raisons alléguées des deux côtés' (p.137). To make sure that neither side dominates the storytelling, the author alternates the gender of the narrators throughout the entire work. Therefore, in the world of the *Heptaméron*, men are no longer the dominant group in the chain of speech communion. Unlike many of the other women observed so far, the female *devisantes* of the *Heptaméron* feel under no obligation either to remain silent, or to tell lies when in male company. This unusual equality of gender in speech seems to be made possible only by the very fact that the characters are located outside their normal social situation. Trapped in a monastery in the mountains and cut off from the world by impassable rivers, the group finds itself in a kind of limbo, where normal conventions may be temporarily suspended. One of the members of the group, Hircan, is evidently aware of this rather superficial situation, whereby both sexes have equal freedom of speech, for he states: 'au jeu sommes tous égaux' (p.49). Dismissal of conventional proprieties is made even clearer by a passage in the prologue, *before* the 'game' begins, where Hircan's wife submissively requests permission to speak:

Mais Parlamente, qui était femme de Hircan, laquelle n'était jamais oisive ni mélancolique, ayant demandé congé à son mari de parler, dit à l'ancienne dame Oisille.... (p.45).

This reluctance to speak out of turn is sharply contrasted by Parlamente's confident eloquence throughout the actual storytelling (of all the stories, hers are undoubtedly the longest). Indeed, the etymological link between the name Parlamente and the verb 'parler' appears to have been intentional. Freedom of speech for the five women narrators is also facilitated by a situation which breaks down the usual gender roles. Away from the traditional feminine and masculine work-space, the group is, at first, at a loss as to how to organize their time:

Si nous sommes en nos maisons, il nous faut la chasse et la volerie, qui nous fait oublier mille folles pensées; et les dames ont leur ménage, leur ouvrage, et quelques fois les danses où elles prennent honnête exercice (p.46).

By disregarding certain assumptions about feminine behaviour, the women in the *Heptaméron* gain access to the dual role of storyteller/author and listener/reader. In Chapter 2, Section 4, I discussed the different reading material recommended for each of the sexes. Remembering that only morally edifying works are in the lists directed towards the woman reader, many of the bawdy stories 'read' by the five women in the *Heptaméron* seem distinctly inappropriate for the female sex. Nevertheless, the women in the group are pictured enjoying the most vulgar of the tales. Even the most austere member of the company cannot restrain her laughter, when Nomerfide recounts the farcical and rather obscene tale of a woman's adventures in a sordid Franciscan lavatory:

Combien que le conte soit ord et sale, connaissant les  
personnes à qui il est advenu, on ne le saurait trouver fâcheux  
(p.131).

It may, of course, be argued that even the most light-hearted tales may provoke serious discussion, as one of the readers themselves observes:

Mais regardons, dit Simontaut, de là où nous sommes venus:  
en partant d'une très grande folie, nous sommes tombés en la  
philosophie et la théologie (p.308).

As both writers and readers of stories, the women of the *Heptaméron* seem to be released from the usual restrictions imposed on them by gender discrimination. However, as will be seen below, the notion of gender does, in fact, remain of utmost importance in all the discussions of the *devisants*.

### Marriage

The whole of the *Heptaméron* is set in a Christian context. The storytellers are together in a monastery, attend mass, and partake in a session of Bible reading each morning. The choice of a woman, the widow Oisille, to act as a kind of lay preacher, underlines the extent to which the setting of the *Heptaméron* is removed from the reality of sixteenth-century society. As has already been seen, women are generally dissuaded from delving into theological discussion and are most certainly banned from teaching this subject. In the prologue to her work, Marguerite draws a direct parallel between the biblical flood and the tempestuous weather which has prevented the *devisants* from leaving the Pyrenees:

Mais sur le temps de ce retour, vinrent les pluies si  
merveilleuses et si grandes qu'il semblait que Dieu eût oublié la  
promesse qu'il avait faite à Noé de ne détruire plus le monde  
par eau (p.39).

Inherent in this reference to the flood, is the idea that the society of the time of the *Heptaméron* is perhaps in some need of being reformed. Seen in this light, the stories and the conversations of the work take on the purpose of cataloguing the various abuses of the relationship God intended to exist between man and woman. It is perhaps not completely out of place to recall that in the New Testament, Matthew mentions marriage in his reference to the flood:

For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark (Matthew, 24:38).

Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* could justifiably be considered as constituting one of the most fascinating reflections of marital relations in the sixteenth century. The picture conveyed by the author is a many faceted one; a kaleidoscopic vision of matrimony as ranging from an exalted Christian institution ('Dieu a mis si bon ordre... tant à l'homme qu'à la femme que si l'on n'en abuse, je tiens mariage le plus beau et le plus sûr état qui soit au monde', p.323), to the most despairingly hellish state ('faubourgs d'enfer', p.335). In many ways, the *Heptaméron* represents an amalgamation of the themes already discussed in both Sections 1 and 2 of this chapter. Moreover, the *Heptaméron* is not totally unrelated to the *Querelle des Femmes*, for discussion of the question of women's relative merits occurs throughout. However, in the prologue, the author is particularly careful to insist that the truth of her work should not be marred by abusive use of rhetorical devices:

... de peur que la beauté de la rhétorique fit tort en quelque partie à la vérité de l'histoire (p.48).

Unlike the contributors to the highly rhetorical *Querelle*, the devisants of the *Heptaméron* insist throughout that the stories they are relating are based on true happenings. As J.D. Bernard suggests, the first tale recounted by the somewhat misogynist Simontaut 'threatens to sink the *Heptaméron* in the bog of the contemporary *querelle des femmes*'.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the wording of Simontaut's comments on the tale have a remarkably familiar ring to them:

Vous trouverez que depuis qu'Ève fit pécher Adam toutes les femmes ont pris possession de tourmenter, tuer et damner les hommes (p.56).

The voice of Simontaut is soon drowned by a whole gamut of different opinions which save the *Heptaméron* from adopting any polemical extremes. The very fact that Marguerite is reluctant to impose one argument ensures that her work will stand apart from the group of texts constituting the *Querelle des Femmes*. The *Heptaméron*'s position outside the *Querelle* is also made obvious by the author's refusal to abide by the rules of this very masculine

game. In the mouth of Parlamente (generally accepted to be most representative of the author's views), Marguerite expresses her disapproval of random use of biblical examples to support an argument:

Vous voudriez suivre... l'opinion des mauvais hommes qui prennent un passage de l'Écriture pour eux et laissent celui qui leur est contraire (pp.460-61).

### The Masculine Conquest

As readers of the tales of the *Heptaméron*, the *devisants'* reactions seem to be largely conditioned by gender. Throughout the work, we witness widely divergent responses of both the male and the female sex to the subject of marriage. While the male storytellers expect the wife to remain chaste and faithful, most, with the exception of Dagoucin, feel that men are under no obligation to return such fidelity. The women also favour female chastity and are often surprisingly harsh in their condemnation of the adulteress. However, the same women rarely see male infidelity as irredeemable and believe that the wise wife will always strive to regain her husband's love through a show of outstandingly patient love. The reactions of Marguerite's women readers may be compared with those of the group of readers in Jeanne Flore's *Comptes Amoureux*. In the case of the *Comptes*, the readers, having the advantage of being all women, no longer feel any obligation to read in the manner expected of their sex. As a consequence, they are free to reject the patriarchal morality and adopt a mode of reading which would normally be opposed by men. In contrast, the women in the *Heptaméron*, finding themselves in male company, must continue to read in a way which will gain the approval of the men who are present. Thus, in spite of the initial apparent equality of the sexes, the traditional roles for both women and men do, in fact, continue to dictate the actual manner in which the stories of the *Heptaméron* are read. As we listen to the comments of Marguerite's readers, we become quickly aware of a deeply entrenched double standard, which governs the behaviour of each of the sexes. Woman is frequently depicted as an object of conquest, to be won by the male pursuer. Consequently, images of hunting and war are common in the language of the male storytellers and many of the characters in the tales themselves:

Mesdames, si vous êtes sages, vous garderez de nous comme le cerf, s'il avait entendement, ferait de son chasseur. Car notre gloire, notre félicité et notre contentement, c'est de vous voir prises et de vous ôter ce qui est plus cher que la vie (p.176).

The force of male sexual appetite is also conveyed by reference to the actual consumption of the female body:

... la crainte qu'il avait d'être surpris et qu'on lui ôtat sa proie lui  
faisait emporter son agneau, comme un loup sa brebis, pour la  
manger à son aise (p.294).

In situations where the relationship between the sexes is envisaged as a kind of battle, the woman inevitably becomes the despised enemy, rather than an object of love. Such is the case in tale no. 10, where the character Amadour attempts at all costs to gain the 'victoire de son ennemie' (p.117). In order to illustrate the theme of the male conquest, the *Heptaméron* includes numerous accounts of both attempted and actual rapes (see, in particular, nos 2, 4, 10, 62). The male attitude is frequently a rather frighteningly grim determination to vanquish the female, under whatever circumstances. In no.10, the pursued female disfigures her face in a desperate attempt to escape her seducer. However, resolute in his aim to defeat, Amadour remains coldly unaffected by such mutilation:

La difformité de votre visage, que je pense être faite de votre  
volonté, ne m'empêche point de faire la mienne. Car quand je  
ne pourrais avoir de vous que les os, si les voudrais-je tenir  
auprès de moi! (p.119).<sup>41</sup>

The response of the male *devisants* to Amadour's struggles reveal that such behaviour seems not only to have been condoned, but actually expected of the sixteenth-century man:

Si Amadour eût été plus amoureux que craintif, il n'eut pas  
laissé pour si peu son entreprise.... Mais encore faut-il que je  
loue Amadour de ce qu'il fit une partie de son devoir (p.124).

Furthermore, as Hircan implies, the notion of male honour seems to encompass victory in the seduction of women:

Si j'en étais jusque là... je me tiendrais pour déshonoré si je ne  
venais à la fin de mon intention (p.73).

Ironically, as a clear example of the double standard of morality, a woman who is unable to resist her male pursuer is immediately deprived of all feminine honour:

Bien malheureuse est la dame qui ne garde bien soigneusement  
le trésor qui lui apporte tant d'honneur (p.76).

Therefore, aware that women will be particularly anxious to preserve their honour, the cunning male will adopt a subtle method of seduction:

Car qui est celle qui nous fermera ses oreilles quand nous  
commencerons à l'honneur et à la vertu?... Mais nous couvrons



notre diable du plus bel ange que nous pouvons trouver. Et sous cette couverture, avant que d'être connus, recevons beaucoup de bonnes chères. Et peut-être tirons les cœurs des dames si avant que, pensant aller droit à la vertu, quand elles connaissent le vice elles n'ont le moyen ni le loisir de retirer leurs pieds (p.138).

Comments such as these are certain to provoke disharmony among the group of readers. Unable to 'read' as a man, the female *devisants* frequently dispute the masculine mode of interpretation:

Mais, dit Parlamente, je m'ébahis de vous deux, comme vous osez tenir tels propos! (p.93).

Exposed to the aggressive male response to certain tales, the women readers are made aware of their defencelessness in the face of male pursuit. Consequently, they repeatedly reaffirm the necessity of flight from such situations:

Il faut tant craindre qu'il soit vrai que, dès que vous en apercevez quelque étincelle, vous devez fuir ce feu qui a plus tôt brûlé un cœur qu'il ne s'en est aperçu (p.158).

### Adultery

The female adulteress is almost always punished in the world of the *Heptaméron*. In tale no.32, a cuckolded husband confines his unfaithful wife to the bedroom where her adultery occurred. The husband places the bones of the murdered lover in the same room, so that they may serve as a constant reminder to his wife of her guilt. Once a day, the wife is released from her prison, in order to drink from the skull of her dead lover. Also, as a sign of her infidelity, her head has been shorn:

... car l'arraïement des cheveux n'appartient à l'adultère, ni le voile à l'impudique. Parquoi s'en va rasée montrant qu'elle a perdu l'honneur de la chasteté et pudicité (p.297).

The readers, male and female, of this tale are unanimous in their praise for the husband's disciplinary measures:

Je trouve, dit Parlamente, cette punition autant raisonnable qu'il est possible (p.299).

Moreover, another female character declares that once female honour has been sullied, nothing can possibly buy it back:

Vous savez que, quelque chose que puisse faire une femme après un tel méfait, ne saurait réparer son honneur (p.299).

A second story (no.36) relates the manner in which a husband, having discovered his wife's adultery, avoids scandal by continuing to praise her in public, before, some time later, actually poisoning her. Angered by the story of the wife's infidelity, Hircan, whose views on male adultery are so liberal, declares this unforgivable act to represent: 'la plus grand injure que la femme peut faire à l'homme' (p.318). Just as the adulterous woman of tale no.32 was deprived of her femininity by having her hair cut off, Parlamente, condemning female concupiscence, links a loss of feminine identity with such behaviour:

Celles qui sont vaincues en plaisir ne se doivent plus nommer femmes, mais hommes, desquels la fureur et la concupiscence augmente leur honneur (p.359).

The double sexual standard, which blames the wanton wife, while tolerating the adulterous husband, is reflected by the comments of characters within certain stories (see, for example, p.167). Examples of male adultery abound in the *Heptaméron*, whereas in the *Decameron*, attention is focused above all on the wife's misdemeanours. Most of these tales are variations on one particular theme: pursuit of the chambermaid (see nos 8, 38, 45, 59, 69, 71). The stories treat this category of infidelity in a light-hearted, jocular manner, viewing male adultery as something to be laughed off, rather than criticized. Indeed, male adultery is generally met, by the female readers, with tolerance, patience and the desire to win back the wayward husband. Such is the case in no.38, where a woman, on finding out her husband's infidelity, furnishes and heats the house of his less than wealthy mistress, in order to ensure her own husband's comfort. Her patience is rewarded by the return of the conscience-stricken husband:

Sans le moyen de cette grande douceur et bonté, il était impossible qu'il eût jamais laissé la vie qu'il menait (p.325).

Naturally, in this unbalanced world, no husband is beaten, locked up, or murdered for his crimes, but, unlike the wife, has the possibility of being forgiven for his behaviour. Interestingly, one of the ways in which many wives regain their husband's love, is by the non-violent method of lecturing them back to fidelity. In no.15, we witness the unusual situation of a wife delivering a perfectly balanced rhetorical speech, questioning the existence of different sexual values for each sex:

Et combien que la loi des hommes donne grand déshonneur aux femmes qui aiment autres que leurs maris, si est-ce que la loi de Dieu n'exempte point les maris qui aiment autres que leurs femmes. Et s'il faut mettre à la balance l'offense de vous et de moi, vous êtes homme sage et expérimenté et d'âge pour

connaître et éviter le mal; moi jeune et sans expérience nulle de la force et puissance d'amour. Vous avez une femme qui vous cherche, estime, et aime plus que sa vie propre, et j'ai un mari qui me fuit, qui me hait et me déprise plus que chambrière (p.166).

The husband, astounded by his wife's eloquence, is left almost speechless, able only to give a brief, rather unsatisfactory, reply:

Le mari, oyant ces propos pleins de vérité, dits d'un si beau visage, avec une grâce tant assurée et audacieuse qu'elle ne montrait ni craindre, ni mériter nulle punition, se trouva, tant surpris d'étonnement qu'il ne sut que lui répondre, sinon que l'honneur d'un homme et d'une femme n'étaient pas semblables (p.167).

#### Hidden Tensions

A close reading of the *Heptaméron* reveals that even among the *devisants* themselves, there are subtle, but constant tensions.<sup>42</sup> Marguerite seems to create a deliberately ambivalent atmosphere, where we are left to question the actual nature of the various relationships within the group. We come to realize that all the storytellers were acquainted with each other before their encounter in the Pyrenees. Therefore, in spite of being cut off from society, members of the group will occasionally restore the link with reality, by making some reference to the past behaviour of one of the *devisants*. Although we know that Hircan and Parlamente are married, the author only hints that there may be another married couple in our presence, leaving us to guess the true situation:

La compagnie, qui s'alla coucher si joyeusement que je pense que ceux qui étaient mariés ne dormirent pas si longtemps que les autres (p.335).

Moreover, in the prologue to the whole work, while learning that Dagoucin and Saffredent are the 'serviteurs' of Parlamente and Longarine, we are never explicitly told which of the men is devoted to which lady. We are, however, informed that Simontaut has, for a long time, been Parlamente's 'très affectionné serviteur' (p.44), although it would seem that her husband, and possibly the other *devisants*, are unaware of his attentions. The ambiguity of the internal relations in the group is characterized by persistent veiled references, troubling the calm joviality of the eight days of storytelling. Wishing to solve the mystery, the reader outside the text will naturally focus his attention on the words of the *devisants* and explore, even further than the text first seems to require, the complex nature of male/female

relationships. On several instances, allusions to the behaviour of the narrators become a little too direct, risking to destroy the pleasant atmosphere of their pastime:

'J'ai ouï dire, dit Parlamente, qu'il n'a pas tenu à votre femme qu'elle ne vous ait trouvé bien près de cet habillement, quelque finesse que vous ayez! Dont onques puis elle n'eut repos.' - 'Contentez-vous des fortunes de votre maison, dit Simontaut, sans venir chercher les miennes' (p.465).

At moments such as these, one of the members of the group will intervene to restore order:

Vraiment, ce dit Géburon, vous êtes une bonne dame qui, en lieu de faire rire la compagnie comme vous aviez promis, mettez ces deux pauvres gens en colère (p.86).

The same ambiguity reigns with regard to the characters in the tales themselves, many of which refer to people known by the group. It is for this reason that most of the storytellers choose to censor the names from their stories. However, the anonymity of these characters is often only too easily guessed by the other narrators:

Et vu que les noms sont supposés, je pense le reconnaître. Mais puisque Parlamente ne l'a voulu nommer, aussi ne ferai-je (p.125).

The portrayal of the relations between Parlamente and Hircan is particularly complex. Throughout the *Heptaméron*, subtle allusions to Hircan's infidelities are made by the narrators as well as by the culprit himself (see, for example, p.257). Parlamente's reaction is generally to turn a blind eye to such comments, refusing to decipher the scarcely veiled allusions:

Il en fera ce qu'il lui plaira, dit Parlamente, mais je veux croire, pour mon contentement, qu'il dit toujours ainsi (p.313).

During the course of the *Heptaméron*, we gradually see that Parlamente is, in fact, yet another example of the patiently chaste wife, gently lecturing her husband out of his bad ways. Hircan himself, while bragging of male conquests, will suddenly remember the presence of his wife in the company and emphatically deny his own involvement in such deeds:

L'amour que je vous porte me rend plus obéissant à vous que la crainte de mort ni d'enfer (p.427).

When Parlamente does venture a reference to her husband's infidelity, his reaction is one of anger:

Hircan, qui devinait bien pourquoi elle le disait, répondit en colère (p.317).

However, at other points in the eight days, by means of sexual innuendo, Marguerite seems to suggest that the marriage is far from unhappy. On the morning of the fourth day, Hircan and Parlamente arrive late for the session of Bible reading. Their delay is subsequently explained by a remark made by Hircan:

Si ma femme, dit-il, n'eût commencé celle d'hier, je lui eusse donné ma voix, combien que j'aie toujours pensé qu'elle m'ait aimé plus que tous les hommes du monde, si est-ce qu'à ce matin elle m'a montré m'aimer mieux que Dieu ni sa parole (p.290).

Conscious of her husband's possible jealousy, Parlamente discreetly conceals her awareness of the attentions of Simontaut:

A cette parole, Parlamente l'entendit très bien, qui se prit à tousser. Parquoi Hircan ne s'aperçut de la couleur qui lui venait aux joues (p.49).

The main technique adopted by Marguerite, in order to maintain an atmosphere of uncertainty, is to replace names with pronouns, which, while denoting gender, do not direct us to one specific person:

Il est vrai que, durant ce propos, un de la compagnie se prit bien fort à rire, sachant que celle qui prenait les paroles de Saffredent à son avantage n'était pas tant aimée de lui qu'il en eût voulu souffrir cornes, honte ou dommage. Et quand Saffredent aperçut que celle qui riait l'entendait, il s'en tint content et se tut (p.66).

Thus, the act of reading and interpretation becomes doubly complex, as the individual *devisants* seek both general and personal meaning in the stories. What, at first sight, appears to be a straightforward process of storytelling and reading, is complicated by the relationships existing within a group of mixed-sex readers. The motives governing the selection of certain tales, and the actual mode of reading them, are frequently clouded by the narrators' desire to convey particular veiled messages to one or other of the *devisants*. Therefore, gender, while at first seemingly unimportant in a situation away from society and its usual conventions, becomes an essential factor in dictating both the narration and the reading of the stories of the *Heptaméron*.

PART TWO

WOMEN'S VOICES

## INTRODUCTION

### PART TWO

Until now, I have been focusing principally on women as readers and examining various images of the Renaissance woman which appear in texts by male authors. Criticism centring on the examination of images of women (known as the 'feminist critique') dominated feminist literary studies in the early 1970's. Since then, feminists have tended to view this approach as somewhat negative, for it concentrates our attention solely upon male writing. By studying images of women, we inevitably learn more about the attitudes of the male writer than about women themselves. The field of the feminist critique is seen as a small and limited one, which will always lead to the same conclusions, that is to say, that in a patriarchal society, images of women will always be inauthentic, picturing the female sex as the alienated Other, existing exclusively in relation to a male world. By its nature, such an approach tends to be repetitive, or even harmful, in its potential failure to heighten women's self-awareness:

The critique also has a tendency to naturalise women's victimisation, by making it the inevitable and obsessive topic of discussion.<sup>1</sup>

In 1979, Elaine Showalter adapted the French term 'la gynocritique', producing the new, popular, anglicized form 'gynocritics'. As a critical approach, gynocritics focuses on women as writers rather than readers. Women are therefore studied as active rather than passive; the enunciators rather than the enounced; the creators rather than the created. Gynocritics has no specifically defined centre and the field is consequently far more varied than that of the feminist critique. Gynocritics underlines the need to examine women's literature in order to escape from male-oriented analysis:

Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the nearly visible world of female culture.<sup>2</sup>

Work undertaken in the field of gynocritics includes the 'rediscovery' of female writers; studies of particular women writers; the problem of defining characteristics of a female language; rewriting the female literary history, and so forth.

Most feminists agree that there is something unique about women's writing. However, there is much discussion over what constitutes this difference. Béatrice Didier

states that the marginality of female writing may be seen by the existence of numerous anthologies of women's works, while an equivalent anthology of male writing would be unthinkable:

Le fait même que ce livre soit impensable, alors qu'un livre sur l'écriture féminine est malgré tout pensable, caractérise bien la marginalité de l'écriture féminine.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the difficulty of defining the precise nature of gender difference in writing, an examination of a number of women writers (even those separated by time and by different cultural backgrounds) illustrates that women writers *do* share certain common characteristics:

S'il était peut-être difficile, sinon impossible, de traiter de façon théorique de l'écriture féminine, il est bien vrai que, dans la pratique, les écrits de femmes ont une parenté qu'on ne trouverait pas dans les écrits d'hommes.<sup>4</sup>

A number of feminists believe that the essence of femininity may be found in the unconscious. Kristeva's *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris, 1974) redefines the psychoanalytic theory of language acquisition from a feminist perspective. She challenges Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary (the phase in which a child experiences unity with its mother before learning a language) and the Symbolic (the phase into which we move, when exiled from the Imaginary, and learn to speak, gradually identifying more with the paternal side). Kristeva redefines the Imaginary as 'le sémiotique', naming its articulations 'chora' (taken from Plato), which constitute a pre-verbal, rhythmic language. Kristeva views adherence to a semiotic discourse as a challenge to the Symbolic, for, in advocating the writer's return to the preverbal identification with the mother, she is implicitly rejecting the logic of paternal speech. However, the Symbolic phase is seen as interacting with the Semiotic/Imaginary and not eliminating it. Both forms function in discourse, indicating that the use of a feminine language is a possibility available to both men and women.<sup>5</sup> One of the principal divisions in discussion on women's writing results from adherence to opposing beliefs concerning the origin of difference, as related either to biological or social factors. Women's writing, as a result of biological difference, may be defined as 'female writing'. Writing has often been assimilated to the sexual act. However, the comparison has always been envisaged in terms of male sexuality and potency; the pen being described as a metaphorical penis, while the blank page is representative of the hymen. This tradition, which defines woman as a male creation, clearly has important implications for a woman wishing to become a writer. In doing so, a woman must refuse her status as a passive object, in order to appropriate the role of active creator. For a writer such as Christine de Pizan, this transformation is described in terms of actually becoming a man. In her work, *Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*, Christine speaks of the change which took place in her life, following the death of her husband. Circumstances forced the author to don a role which entailed



moving out into the public domain and engaging in traditionally male work. Once outside the feminine work-sphere, Christine had the option of taking for herself the essentially masculine role of writer. It is through an extended metaphor, describing her metamorphosis into a man, that Christine conveys her movement from the feminine to a masculine domain:

Je m'esveillay et fu le cas  
 Tel qu'incontinent et sanz doubte  
 Transmuee me senti toute.  
 Mes membres senti trop plus fors  
 Qu'ainçois...  
 Si me senti trop plus legiere  
 Que ne souloye et que ma chiere  
 Estoit muee et enforcie  
 Et ma voix forment engrossie  
 Et corps plus dur et plus isnel...  
 Plus ne me tins en la parece  
 De plour, qui croissoit ma destresse.  
 Fort et hardi cuer me trouvay,  
 Dont m'esbahi, mais j'esprouvay  
 Que vray homme fus devenu.<sup>6</sup>

Critics such as Hélène Cixous or Luce Irigaray attempt to reverse the analogy of the pen as penis, by representing the female body as the generator of a woman's language. Irigaray links certain characteristics of women's writing to the multiplicity of their libidinal energies and the actual form of the female genitals. The vulva with its dual lips is related to characteristics of female writing such as plurality and diversity. Cixous describes writing as being of the body, believing the concepts of giving birth, mothering or female sexual pleasure to be particularly relevant. In *Le Rire de la Méduse* (1975), she urges women to write for other women in white ink (symbolizing a mother's milk), using writing as a means of nourishing each other. Cixous demands, in particular, that women create a discourse between themselves, as a means of escaping their imposed silence:

It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, even in the sixteenth century, women writers already tend to write specifically for women, addressing their works to an all-female audience. The metaphor of childbirth as a means of conveying the process of literary creation is a common one. In works as far back as Plato's *Symposium*, poets compare their spiritual offspring to the inferior human progeny.<sup>8</sup> Thus, as bearer of 'children', the male poet is able to denigrate the biological act of giving birth, by proclaiming his own creative talents to be superior to those of the female mother.

When the same metaphor occurs in the works of a woman writer, the emphasis is, as might be expected, quite different. In *L'Avison-Christine*, the author is lectured to by the allegorical figure 'Science de poesie nature', who, rather than declaring the superiority of the spiritual birth, draws a realistic comparison between Christine's well-rewarded struggles to produce a literary text, and the labour pains experienced by a pregnant woman:

Or vueil que de toy naiscent nouveaulx volumes... lesquieulx  
en ioye et delit tu enfanteras de ta memoire non obstant le  
labour et travail lequel tout ainsi comme la femme qui a  
enfante, si tost que ot le cry de lenfant oublie son mal,  
oublieras le travail du labour oyant la voix de tes volumes  
(*L'Avison-Christine*, pp.163-64).

Thus, the birth metaphor, although a commonplace manner of depicting the literary act, takes on particular relevance when employed by a woman who was, in fact, mother of three children.

Without denying the importance of studying the part played by the female body in the act of writing, for the purpose of this part of my thesis, I wish to examine women's writing solely within a social context. Certain patterns of thematic and stylistic characteristics recur in the works of the women writers to be focused on in the next two chapters. However, I do not believe that these may be attributed to the biological role of women. Similarities between sixteenth-century women writers seem to be less the result of sex than of certain constraints shared by all women who attempt to assert a voice in a male-dominated discourse. Women's limited access to education places them at an immediate disadvantage, causing them necessarily to be less eloquent speakers. Women's relegation to the confines of the household prevents them from encountering people, cutting them off from discourse with others and thus from potential sources of literary stimulation. Moreover, as private beings living in a limited world, their lack of public experience will, of course, limit the range of possible subjects for writing. The duties assigned to women within the household were no doubt extremely arduous, leaving little time available to devote to literary activities. Those women who did manage to write, while confined to the house, tend to produce rather claustrophobic and inward-looking texts. Unlike the male writer, whose works are often part of a group of writings (e.g. the *Querelle* or the *Blasons Anatomiques*), the sixteenth-century woman writer stands out as a rather solitary character, isolated from other women writers. Finally, even if women succeeded in writing, their work was open to prejudiced judgement by male critics. It has already been seen how women's speech is judged by very different criteria from male discourse. Women's writing is therefore also likely to be judged as trivial or gossipy, and consequently inferior to works by men. Indeed, such is the case where, in *L'Avison-*

*Christine*, the author is informed by Dame Opinion that many of her contemporaries refuse to believe that her works are actually her own:

Les aucuns dient que clers ou religieux les te forgent, et que de sentement de femme venir ne pourroyent (*L'Avison-Christine*, p.143).

Christine is not the only woman to have suffered this criticism. The authorship of many works by women (including Jeanne Flore who will be discussed in the following chapter) has been disputed by sceptical male critics. If we are to accept that differences between male and female speech/writing result from the constraints of the social context, then it seems possible to say that given access to a public world and male roles, women might write differently. In other words, I believe women write as they do, not because of any female essence they may have, but because of social constraints resulting from their position in the power hierarchy:

S'il existe, malgré les différences d'époque, de tempérament, et... de qualité, des lignes de force communes qui permettent de reconnaître un écrit féminin... peut-être est-ce dû, au moins en partie, à une certaine situation de la femme dans la société. Situation fort variable certes. Néanmoins l'écriture féminine semble presque toujours le lieu d'un conflit entre un désir d'écrire, souvent si violent chez la femme, et une société qui manifeste à l'égard de ce désir, soit une hostilité systématique, soit cette forme atténuée, mais peut-être plus perfide encore, qu'est l'ironie ou la dépréciation.<sup>9</sup>

The very act of a woman writing in the sixteenth century is a courageous one which, as Cixous declares, presents a challenge to the male-dominated discourse. The desire to speak in public (for writing *is* a public act) illustrates a woman's need to break her imposed silence. Women writers need to try to rediscover the Self which has been denied them in representations of themselves, by male authors, as the Other. Seen in this light, it would appear impossible to separate the 'images of women' approach from gynocritics, for surely reaction against male perception of the female plays a major role in determining the nature of women's writing? Indeed, women's attempt to define themselves as independent of relationships with men may partly explain the overwhelming presence of the first person found in works written by women. The use of 'je' has been perceived as indicating women's assertion of an identity which has been constantly denied them:

Le 'je' n'est si envahissant dans la littérature féminine que parce que son existence est contestée.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the reality of the sixteenth-century woman's existence within a limited, private world highlights one of the causes of the introspective nature of her writing. Women's writing frequently takes the form of an internal monologue, which seems to underline her isolated position in the chain of speech communion. The use of the internal monologue appears to be the direct result of the male enforcement of the rule of silence, causing women

to internalize their speech. Thus, women's writing often presents the inner-life of female characters in a more personal and exaggerated form than is found in men's writing:

*L'écriture féminine est une écriture du Dedans: l'intérieur du corps, l'intérieur de la maison.*<sup>11</sup>

As might be expected, women's writing is frequently autobiographical (or semi-autobiographical); the main character being the author herself (see, for example, Christine de Pizan, Hélienne de Crenne, Marguerite de Navarre, etc.). Discussing women's preference for the autobiographical mode of writing, Ann Rosalind Jones explains this choice, by arguing that since woman is herself the text (the hymen-page rather than the penis-pen) then it becomes difficult for her to distance her own life from her art:

The attraction of women writers to personal forms of expression like letters, autobiographies, confessional poetry, diaries, and journals points up the effect of a life experienced as an art or an art experienced as a kind of life.... Many books by women writers... cannot be finished because they are as ongoing and open-ended as the lives of their authors.<sup>12</sup>

One of the handicaps for women writers is that the discourse into which they enter, when writing, is one in which literary conventions have been established by men. Many of these are unsuitable for women to use, such as Petrarchism which envisages love solely from the male view point, perceiving woman as a distant, unreal image. Women writers are faced with a basic dilemma; either they accept the male conventions and write within an alien and often sexist framework, or they strive to discover an alternative to male modes of writing. That alternative may, in fact, be the somewhat autobiographical or confessional mode of writing, which has frequently been criticized as formless, trivial and lacking in action:

The alternative is to take as one's model (and structured principle) not male myth but the structure of one's own experience.... How to write a novel about a person to whom nothing happens?... A person inhabiting a world in which the only reality is frustration or endurance - or these plus an unbearably mystifying confusion?<sup>13</sup>

Commenting on the apparently formless nature of women's writing, Hélène Cixous views this as a positive indication of the unlimited character of such writing:

A feminine textual body can be recognised by the fact that it is always without end, has no finish.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, in an attempt to shatter sexist clichés which depict women as talkative or gossipy, female critics often laud the feminine voice as being fluent:

Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible.<sup>15</sup>

Because of the unrhetorical nature of women's writing, the subjective female voice becomes more distinctive than the objective male one, which is marked and hidden by rhetorical conventions. Free from the mask of rhetoric, women's writing is often characterized by a distinct feeling of sincerity, conspicuously absent from the majority of male works discussed so far. Struggling to find a voice for herself, the woman writer is certain to encounter difficulties when using masculine language:

Women never carry the thing off properly. They underdo or overemphasize everything to such an extent their behaviour almost seems a caricature: the traditional fate of oppressed who try to 'pass for' oppressors.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, in the following chapters, I will be exploring the somewhat awkward styles of many sixteenth-century women writers, who strive to compete with the male voice. Critics often term women's writing as 'bitextual', believing it to draw on both masculine and feminine traditions. Conscious that they are disobeying the precept of female silence, women writers generally tend to be unusually apologetic for their writing. In their hands, the modesty topos, a common device used by sixteenth-century male writers, ceases to be solely rhetorical, often occurring, not just at the beginning of a work, but repeatedly throughout the text. Moreover, the modesty topos, indicative of women's insecurity as writers, is frequently developed into a lengthy and openly self-critical analysis. References to the actual process of writing, and the creation of a book as a material object intended for publication, are also a notable feature of the highly self-conscious feminine text.

Woman's position as wife and mother within the family unit has been conceived as 'répressive par rapport à la création féminine'.<sup>17</sup> It is, no doubt, for this reason that the majority of sixteenth-century writers are widows. It is only as a widow, that, in the second half of the sixteenth century, Madeleine des Roches may paint an image of childhood as infinitely more conducive to writing than marriage. However, any talents for writing have no time to develop before a girl is married:

Au temps heureux de ma saison passée,  
J'avoy bien l'aile unie à mon costé:  
Mais en perdant ma jeune liberté,  
Avant le vol ma plume fut cassee.

Je voudroy bien m'arester sur le livre,  
Et au papier mes peines souspirer:  
Mais quelque soing m'en vient tousjours tirer,  
Disant qu'il fault ma profession suivre  
(*Oeuvres*, p.3).

With a clever pun on the double meaning of 'plume', Madeleine presents an image of marriage as representing both constraint (a broken wing), and curtailment of talent (a broken

pen). Significantly, in *Le Livre de la Mutacion*, as Christine describes her movement into a masculine world, we learn that her wedding ring falls to the ground:

Mais choit de mon doy fu l'anel  
Qu'Ymeneüs donné m'avoit  
(*Mutacion*, pp.51-52).

Now, without the bond of matrimony, Christine may begin her career as a writer. Consoling Christine for the unfortunate loss of her husband at such a young age, Dame Philosophy, in *L'Avision-Christine*, reminds her that it is only because of her new status that she has been able to enter the literary world:

Il nest mie doubte que se ton mary te eust dure uisques a ore,  
lestude tant comme tu as ne eusses frequente. Car occupation  
de meisnage ne le teust souffert (*L'Avision-Christine*, p.175).

In spite of Dame Philosophy's words, in many of her works, Christine mourns her plight as widow, while enumerating her deceased husband's qualities:

Car souhaidier a devis  
Je ne peusse personne  
Sage, prudent, belle et bonne  
Mieux que lui en tous endrois...  
Sa compaignie, m'estoit  
Si plaisant, quant il estoit  
Pres de moy, n'iert femme en vie  
De tous biens plus assouvie;  
Car de toutes riens plaisans,  
Delitables et aisans  
A son povoir il m'aisoit.<sup>18</sup>

By singing the praises of her husband, Christine appears to have instigated a tradition which continues throughout the sixteenth century. Widows such as Philiberte de Fleurs, Madeleine des Roches and Gabrielle de Coignard all adopt the themes set by Christine in her poetry. In her long poem entitled *Les Soupirs de Viduité*, lamenting the death of Jean de Labaulme, Philiberte de Fleurs states how she has resorted to the written word as a means of comfort and self-expression:

Je tâche au vray d'exprimer et d'écrire  
Ce que mon coeur affligé ne peut dire.<sup>19</sup>

Writing as a source of therapeutic consolation is a theme which will be seen to recur repeatedly in numerous texts composed by women. For Philiberte, writing therefore becomes a form of diverted speech, an outlet for the woman who is unable to express herself in spoken language. Ironically, in Philiberte's picture of her husband, one of his most salient qualities is his talent for public speaking:

Etant pourveu d'un bon entendement,  
S'étoit acquis un parfait jugement  
En Poésie, ès accords de Musique,  
Puisés au fond de la Mathématique.  
Bref, il étoit accomply et parfait,  
Chacun l'a pu connoître par effet;  
Car s'il vouloit se commander de faire  
Quelque discours de sérieux affaire,  
Il en sortoit, au grand étonnement  
De qui l'oyoit plus ententivement  
(Philiberte, p.196).

Although Philiberte declares her marriage to have been joyful, her description of her wifely obedience suggests a reason why *Les Soupîrs* appears to have been her first literary production:

Moy donc, étant heureusement réduite  
Sous son pouvoir, par sa sage poursuite,  
Luy obéy l'espace de dix ans,  
Avecques l'heur qu'ores plus je n'attens  
(Philiberte, p.196).

While examining specific works by women, certain themes will be seen to appear repeatedly. All the characteristics of feminine writing discussed in this part of my thesis may, in some way, be related to women's restricted position in sixteenth-century society and, more precisely, to the rule of silence imposed by men. Indeed, as Virginia Woolf suggests in *A Room of One's Own*, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to separate creativity from the social conditions in which the writer lives:

Fiction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground, as science may be; fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible.... But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the house we live in.<sup>20</sup>

Writing offers women the opportunity to challenge the representation of themselves as 'en-soi', by substituting more authentic identities in which they become 'pour-soi' for these stereotypical images. The act of writing for sixteenth-century women may be said to represent much more than a means of communication. Indeed, for women, it was probably the *only* mode of self-expression possible within the public, male domain.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SECULAR WRITINGS

#### 1. Héli-senne de Crenne.

The works of Marguerite Briet are all signed with the pen name, Héli-senne de Crenne.<sup>1</sup> Although the use of such false names was obviously a current literary trend in France, in the case of Héli-senne, and other women writers, the pen name provided (and still does up to this day), a suitable mask behind which to conceal their true identity. In Christine de Pizan's *L'Avison-Christine*, Dame Opinion prophesies that Christine's work will be better appreciated in the future than at the period during which it is being written:

Et le temps a venir plus en sera parlé que a ton vivant.... apres  
ta mort venra le prince plein de valour et sagece qui par la  
relacion de tes volumes desirera tes iours avoir este de son  
temps (*L'Avison-Christine*, p.144).

While Héli-senne's works were certainly not unpopular with her contemporaries, it is only in recent years that a true appreciation of her writing seems to have come about.<sup>2</sup> With my own study of Héli-senne de Crenne, I will be focusing, in particular, on the first part of her earliest work, *Les Angoysses douloureuses qui procedent d'amours* (1538), while making brief reference to her book of letters, *Les Epistres familiares et invectives* (1539). Before beginning this section, to avoid confusion, I should perhaps point out that the protagonist of *Les Angoysses* shares the same name with the author herself. Although this association may encourage us to treat the text as purely autobiographical, I believe that some caution is required. As will be discussed below, the 'sincere' and autobiographical tone of the *Angoysses* forms part of a persuasive rhetoric, subtly employed by the author. We must, therefore, remember that appearances may be deceptive and that this is, after all, a fictional and stylized picture of reality. To complicate the issue even further, the narrator and protagonist are identified as being one and the same.

#### Writing in White Ink

Hélène Cixous' belief that women should write for other women, as a means of nourishing each other (see Intro.2), is exemplified in Héli-senne de Crenne's *Les Angoysses*



*douloureuses*. The work is presented in the form of a confession, where writing is favoured above all for its therapeutic qualities:

Les anxietez et tristesse des miserables, comme je peulx penser  
et conjecturer, se diminuent quand on les peult declarer à  
quelque sien amy fidele (p.1).

However, this confession is not directed to a male priest, as might be expected, but to a specifically female audience. In the liminary *epistre*, by referring to her audience as 'lisantes', 'dames d'honneur' and 'belles nymphes', the narrator immediately establishes her desire for this work to belong solely to the woman reader. From the outset of her narrative, Hélienne elucidates the reason for choosing to confide in an all-female audience. Firstly, she hopes her own story will serve to alert other women to the dangers of sensual love: 'Je vous serviray d'avantgarde' (title page). Secondly, she stresses confidence in her female readers to identify with, and show pity for, her own plight:

Par ce que je suis certaine par moymesmes que les dames  
naturelement sont inclinées à avoir compassion, c'est à vous,  
mes nobles dames, que je veulx mes extremes douleurs estre  
communiquées. Car j'estime que mon infortune vous  
provocquera à quelques larmes piteuses; qui me pourra donner  
quelque refrigeration medicamente (p.1).

As discussed in the introduction to my thesis, confidence in one's addressee provokes a narrowing (convergence) of the distance between the speaker and the listener. This theory helps to explain Hélienne's use of a personal and confessional style. Indeed, throughout the *Angoysses*, the narrator continually reassures her female readers that the confession they are hearing conceals nothing:

Me suis evertuée de vous declarer le tout sans riens reserver  
(p.96).

Conversely, a lack of confidence in one's audience causes the speaker to shift away from the listener's speech style (divergence) and play down any personal element. Such a case occurs when, during the course of the narrative, Hélienne is forced to make her confession to a real priest. In face of this male figure, the protagonist suddenly becomes stubbornly reluctant to speak:

O mon Dieu, que c'est chose fatigieuse et penible de faindre et  
simuler les choses! Je le ditz par ce que n'ay aucun vouloir ny  
affection de communiquer le secret de mes amours en  
confession... parquoy ne me semble que folye de le divulguer à  
ce vieillart, qui est du tout refroidy, impotent, et inutile aux  
effectz de nature. Il me reprimera et blasmera ce que  
aultresfois luy a esté plaisant (p.39).

Mistrust of the male reader is also illustrated in one of Hélienne's *Epistres familiares et invectives*. Her fourth invective letter consists of a defence of literary skills for women, while attacking a male critic named Elenot for his misogynistic attitude towards women writers. The letter is particularly interesting for its challenge to the male image of the ideal feminine role, which, of course, excludes the possibility of literary talent:

Tu t'eforces, de totalement deprimer les autres: et par especial tu increpes et reprens la muliebre condition. Et parlant en general, tu dis que femmes sont de rudes et obnubilez espritz: parquoy tu conclus, qu'autre occupation ne doivent avoir que le filer.... I'ay certaine evidence par cela que si en ta faculté estoit, tu prohiberois le benefice literaire au sexe feminin, l'improperant de n'estre capable des bonnes lettres (sig. o4 ro).

More specifically, the author is worried lest her own book should be read by Elenot:

Mais Helas de douloureuse anxieté suis agitee quand me souvient que de ta bouche abominable i'ay ouy proferer, qu'affectueusement tu desirois de t'ocuper à la lecture des angoysses, qui est de mes petites compositions (sig. o7 ro).

Hélienne's fear of her book's fate in the hands of a pernicious critic is voiced as sarcasm, which serves as a rhetoric of self-protection, concealing the writer's vulnerability in a world of male judgement:

Certainie suis que bonne relation il n'en fera: car combien que mes oeuvres ne soient rien au respect des compositions ardues, que l'on...veoit iournellement pulluler, si ne sera il en ta puissance de les entendre: car ie cognoys de longtemps l'incapacité de ton esprit (sig. o7 vo-o8 ro).

As will be seen below, Hélienne's confident defence of women's writing in this *epistre*, and others, forms a striking contrast to the hesitant apologies found in the *Angoysses*. So, it is an all-female audience in whom Hélienne confides, and this intimate relationship between the author and the readers is sustained throughout the first part of the work. Ever conscious of their presence, Hélienne frequently refers to her audience in the second person, emphasizing the exclusion of the male reader by phrases such as: 'o mes nobles dames'.

Even if the narrator/reader relationship is close, it is far from being a simple one. *Les Angoysses* is not a straightforward confession from one woman to other women, for their relationship is complicated by Hélienne's dual intent. On the surface, the work is quite clearly a didactic one, warning women of love's dangers. Indeed, anxious to underline the moral nature of her work, Hélienne uses the first possible opportunity, within the title itself, to announce her intention to instruct: 'Les Angoysses douloureuses qui procedent d'amours,

contenantz troys parties, composées par Dame Hélienne laquelle exhorte toutes personnes à ne suyvre folle amour'. Hélienne repeatedly refers to the admonitory lesson underlying her account, while presenting herself as an example to be avoided:

L'experience de ma furieuses follie vous puis adviser et donner conseil qui vous sera utile et proffitable pour de tel embrasement vous conserver (p.96).

However, as we read the *Angoysses*, we gradually become aware of a certain ambiguity with regard to the narrator's original statement of didactic intent. In spite of her apparent desire to dissuade the reader from indulging in an illicit love affair, Hélienne seems to use her narrative as a means of freeing herself from any blame. This second, less obvious, motive for writing comes to light when we examine the portrait Hélienne draws of herself as a victim of love. Throughout *Les Angoysses*, the narrator persistently highlights her inability to combat the adulterous love, which gradually draws her away from her husband:

Mon cueur est tant à luy qu'il n'est en ma faculté de le retirer (p.16).

Hélienne carefully crafts her text, so as to present herself as defenceless and innocent, the victim of fate, rather than of her own fallibility:

Je crois que c'estoit predestination divine, par ce que je congnois que serviray d'exemple aux aultres (p.4).

As A. Larsen observes, Hélienne depicts her love as a kind of illness or disease, which gradually destroys her body<sup>3</sup>:

Je continuay celle penible et douloureuse vie, qui me causa une maladie qui m'accompagnera jusques à la mort, laquelle me conduict en telle extremité que le plus souvent contraincte m'estoit de me tenir solitairement en ma chambre (p.49).

Thus, the character conveys her own role in her relationship with her lover, Guenelic, as passive, and therefore exempt from criticism. In order to reinforce the image of herself as a hapless victim, in the first chapter, Hélienne draws our attention to her irreproachable chastity prior to being struck by Cupid's arrow:

Resplendissoys en renommée de chasteté louable; et aussi jamais pour homme que j'eusse veu, combien qu'il fust accomply en don de grace et de nature, mon cueur n'avoit varié, et avoit tousjours ferme propos de vivre ainsi, en desprisant et ayant à abomination celles qui avoient bruiet d'estre flexibles et subjectes à tel delict (p.3).

We must remember that the whole of *Les Angoysses* is filtered through the eyes of Héli-senne alone and that, consequently, the picture of events is one-sided. It is no doubt for this reason that, as readers, we identify more easily with the heroine than with her husband. As a character, the husband is as psychologically inauthentic as many of the women already discussed in the first part of my thesis. Here, it is the male who becomes the Other, being nameless and featureless, characterized solely by his penetrating eyes and aggressive behaviour. The husband's role of jealous voyeur, constantly watching over the heroine is mentioned repeatedly:

Toutes ces choses voioit mon mary, et comme cler voyant....  
(p.9).

In the thirteenth *epistre familiere*, he is appropriately described as Argus, the hundred-eyed mythological giant:

Le vigilant et solিকেতু gardien du chasteau (que tu cognois  
estre plus cler voyant qu'Argus) (sig. 15 ro).<sup>4</sup>

Héli-senne's depiction of her husband's aggression attests to the fact that beating was a punishment inflicted on the sixteenth-century wife:

En grand promptitude il me suyvit, en prenant le premier  
baston qu'il peut trouver, qui fut une torche, et me donna si  
grand coup que violement me fist cheoir à terre. Et pour  
cela ne se peut contenter ne refrener son ire, mais me donna de  
rechief deux ou troys coups si oultrageulx que en plusieurs  
lieux de mon corps la chair blanche, tendre et delicate devint  
noire (p.58).

The husband's only real existence is as an obstacle to Héli-senne's love. Unlike the protagonist, the figure of the husband lacks psychological credibility, as becomes apparent when we consider the unrealistically rapid transformation which takes place in him at the beginning of the text. From the depiction of her husband as loving and gentle ('j'estoye le seul plaisir de mon mary, et me rendoit amour mutuel et reciproque', pp.2-3), Héli-senne quickly metamorphoses him into a jealous, unreasonable, ogre figure as soon as the lover, Guenelic, appears on the scene. It seems likely that this change is not so much in the husband himself, but in the narrator's perception of him. Our sympathies are therefore with the heroine to such an extent that, ironically, rather than incurring our moral indignation, Héli-senne gains our support in her adulterous affair. This is most certainly the response that the narrator hopes to arouse in her female audience, who is carefully chosen to comfort, but not to judge her. Moreover, the very reason why the protagonist's confession to a male priest is so unsatisfactory lies in the fact that his reply is not the one Héli-senne desires to hear:

J'avoys si grand desir de m'absenter, à l'occasion que ses propos m'estoient tristes et odieux, par ce qu'il me persuadoit d'expulser amour de mon cuer.... me sembloit que le religieux me faisoit grand tort de ce qu'il me reprenoit, veu que luy avoye déclaré qu'il n'estoit en ma puissance de me desister d'amours (p.47).

Thus, the narrator subtly manipulates her female audience, using literature as a tool for self-justification and masking this real intention behind an apparently sincere confession of her immoral conduct. Although *Les Angoysses* displays few of the techniques of formal rhetoric observed in the works of many of the male writers studied so far, Hélienne does develop her own rhetoric of persuasion. This rhetoric relies, in particular, on her confessional tone which leads the reader into trusting the author implicitly. A passage which may serve to illustrate the ambiguity surrounding Hélienne's narrative is her description of the mythological figure Medea. The reference occurs at a point when the protagonist is striving to find reasons for abandoning her 'appetit sensuel'. Medea comes to Hélienne's mind as an example of an archetypal unchaste woman. However, significantly, the portrait of Medea is decidedly sympathetic rather than condemning as might have been expected:

Puis comparut en ma memoire le ravissement de Medée, laquelle pour remuneration et recompense d'avoir preservé de mort son amy Jason, il l'expulsa de son pays, parquoy luy fut necessaire de mendier et requerir les suffrages et secours d'autrui; dont advint que la pauvre malheureuse, par ung desespoir, de ses propres mains occist ses enfans (p.6).

It is interesting to find Hélienne, later, resorting to the same mask of didacticism in her first invective letter. Here, she seeks to defend herself against her husband's accusations of immorality by referring him back to the moral stance she adopted in her earlier book, the *Angoysses*:

Bien desireroys, que souvent tu t'occupasses, a penser comment en plusieurs lieux de mes compositions ie deteste amour illicite, et avec affectueux desir ie prie les Dames de tousiours le vivre pudique observer. Par ces remonstrances miennes, tout homme prudent et discret doit croire mon cuer estre pur et chaste (sig. m4 ro).

Finally, the element of self-defence, which runs through the whole of Book One of the *Angoysses*, has been explained by the idea that the work may first have served a practical purpose for the author herself. Paule Demats suggests that the work was initially written as a document in defence of the author's integrity, which was being challenged by her husband and his family.<sup>5</sup> If such a hypothesis is true, it becomes evident why Hélienne is so eager to gain her audience's confidence and approval.

Writing *Les Angoysses*

*Les Angoysses* has frequently been criticized for its lack of unity.<sup>6</sup> However, there is one theme which links the three different parts of the work, that is, the description of the process of writing. References to the actual writing and creation of the very book we are holding occur repeatedly. Over the next two chapters, this self-reflective preoccupation with the process of constructing a piece of literature will be seen to be a trait of many women writers, which may surely be explained by their awareness that they were taking part in a characteristically unfeminine activity. Indeed, the composition of the text becomes a predominant leitmotif, which is as important and interesting to the reader as the actual story of the narrator's love. The act of literary composition is described, in *Les Angoysses*, as one which requires both effort and courage. Hélienne herself realizes that even some of her female readers may believe that a book about adulterous love should not have been attempted by a woman writer:

... ce que, selon l'opinion d'aulcunes Dames timides, se pourra juger plus digne d'estre conservé en profonde silence que d'estre publié et vulgarisé (p.96).

Throughout *Les Angoysses*, we follow the arduous progress of the feminine text, as the author overcomes moments of self-doubt, fear and even writer's block:

La recente memoire rend ma main debile et tremblante, en sorte que par plusieurs foyz y laissay et infestay la plume; mais pensant qu'il me seroit attribué à vice de pusillanimité, je me veulx efforcer de l'escripe (p.34).

The actual realization of the text of the *Angoysses* appears to have been a precarious one for, on two occasions, the manuscript is found and destroyed by Hélienne's husband. The determination and will-power of the heroine to persist in her desire to write are, no doubt, a reflection of the real courage required for a sixteenth-century woman to have this freedom. Indeed, Hélienne displays remarkable determination by continually beginning her work again:

Après plusieurs et diverses ymaginations, je ne trouvay moyen plus convenable que de reduire en ma memoire la piteuse complaincte que paravant j'avoye de ma main escripte, laquelle mon mary avoit bruslée par l'impetuosité de son yre; et me sembla, si elle pouvoit estre consignée entre les mains de mon amy, que cela pourroit estre cause de mettre fin à mes peines.... Moy estant en telle deliberation, subitement je donnay commencement à l'oeuvre presente (p.94).

Even in the twentieth century, women's writing seems to have a rather insecure existence, as Béatrice Didier observes, in her comments on the male desire to 'destroy' the most personal texts composed by women writers:

La tentation de détruire l'œuvre de la femme sera encore plus grande dans la mesure où on la suppose plus autobiographique.<sup>7</sup>

Bearing in mind Didier's words, it is interesting to find Hélienne, in her first invective letter, speaking of her writing as being fictional, rather than a reflection of her own reality. As a defence against her husband's accusation that proof of her infidelity lies in her text, Hélienne claims that her work is not an autobiographical confession, but a literary text created in order to avoid idleness:

La precipiteuse charge de ton cueur a telle imagination t'a conduit que tu as estimé cela (que pour eviter occiosité ay escrit) estre par moy composé, pour faire perpetuelle commemoration d'une amour impudique (sig. m4 vo).

Ironically, here, Hélienne is cleverly defending her writing by recourse to the advice commonly found in courtesy books, for women to fill their idle moments with activities which will secure their chastity. Through the assertion that literature bears no relation to reality, Hélienne takes refuge behind a fictional narrator, who allows her the possibility to write freely, without any of the normal social constraints. In fact, in the *epistre* to her husband, her claim that her work is a purely fictional creation seems quite unrelated to the apparently sincere and autobiographical nature of Book One of the *Angoysses*. The autobiographical work is doubly wounding to male authority, for not only does it represent forbidden speech, but a form of speech which is deliberately feminine. If we remember Erasmus' recommendations for women's speech (see Chapter 1, Section 1), we quickly realize how rebellious Hélienne's voice actually is. In *Le Mariage Chrétien*, Erasmus called for women to exchange their own voice for that of a male (their husband's), while eclipsing prominent character traits. *Les Angoysses*, consisting principally of a series of internal monologues, presents the distinctive voice of a woman who makes no concession to this call to speak as a male.

From Part One to Part Three, the reader follows the progress of the writing of the *Angoysses*, until, at the end, the book actually materializes and is present in its finished form as a printed book. It is only when the protagonist dies that her book may be discovered and published. The theme of the immortality conferred upon an author through literary success is, of course, a common one. However, in the case of *Les Angoysses*, Hélienne's death, before the publication of her book, appears to have particular significance. It seems possible to view

this turn in the plot as forming part of a modesty topos. At several points in her narrative, Hélienne apologizes for breaking through the imposed feminine silence, excusing her inadequate erudition:

Bien suis certaine que ceste mienne petite oeuvre se trouvera de rude et obnubilé esperit au respect de celles que povez avoir leu, qui sont composées par les Orateurs et Hystoriographes... mais en cela me doit servir d'excuse que nostre condition foeminine n'est tant scientifique que naturellement sont les hommes (p.96).

Hélienne's use of apologies, such as this one, suggests why it would be impossible for her to picture herself claiming that her own writing was worthy of being published. Thus, she must disappear from her narrative to allow a male world to make this sort of judgement. The book of *Les Angoysses* is, appropriately, discovered by Mercury, who, as god of speech, reminds us that, for the sixteenth-century woman, the written text represents a form of vicarious speech; a means of self-expression which was not possible through the spoken word. In its material form, Hélienne's book is first pictured as a kind of craft object, a typical piece of women's work which is aesthetically pleasing to the eye. However, first appearances are found to be deceptive, for Mercury soon discovers that this is, in fact, a book in the guise of a feminine art object:

Il apperçeut aupres du corps d'Helienne un petit paquet couvert de soye blanche: lequel en grand promptitude il leva. Puis regarda dedans, et vit que c'estoit un livre (sig. f7 ro).

Mercury carries the book to Jupiter who, as a critic of unquestionable judgement, declares the work to be worthy of publication:

Il vouloit qu'il print la coppie de ce livre, et que diligemment le fist imprimer, a fin de manifester au monde les peines, travaux et angoysses douloureuses, qui procedent a l'occasion d'amours (sig. G5 ro).

When asked where the book should be printed, Jupiter replies with praise for the city of Paris:

N'y avoit lieu plus convenable que a l'excellente et populeuse cité de Paris (sig. G5 vo).

Elsewhere in Hélienne's writing, we find other references to Paris as a city of high learning and culture:

O que ce m'est une inestimable felicité, quand ie pense que me[s] livres ont leurs cours en ceste noble Parisienne cité: laquelle est habitee d'innombrable multitude des gens



merveilleusement scientifiques, et amateurs de l'amenité,  
douceur et suavité, qui se retrouve en la delectable accointance  
de Minerve (*Ep.Inv.4*, sig. o7 vo).

This gratitude to the Parisians' willingness to set aside gender prejudices by publishing the books of a female writer might indicate that elsewhere in France publishers were less open-minded. When we compare Hélienne's picture of the book as a material object with that of several male writers, her discreet modesty is brought to light. Male writers tend to view their own book as more of a 'commercial object', confidently transferred from the private to the public domain. One such example is found in Matheolus' *Lamentations*, where, in the tradition of Juvenal or Horace, the author commands his book to find readers all over France:

Va t'en petit livre, va t'en  
En la Cité, plus n'y atten!...  
Fay publier par toute France  
(Matheolus, pp.2-3).

Another illustration of the male image of the book as an object occurs in Jean Lemaire de Belge's *La Concorde des Deux Langages* (1513) when, in the role of a vassal, the narrator chooses his own book to serve as a offering for the goddess Venus. Lemaire's description of his book contains none of the self-doubt and apology which characterize the works of women writers:

Presentay ung petit tableau de mon industrie, assez bien escript  
et enluminé de vignettes et flourettes, lequel j'estimoye ung  
chief d'œuvre, pour le planter et dedier devant l'ymage de ma  
demy deesse.<sup>8</sup>

Hélienne's portrait of the female writer is not an isolated case. In the texts of other sixteenth-century women writers we may observe a similar concern with the process of writing. In the preface of her *Débat de Folie et d'Amour* (1555), Louise Labé calls for women to break their silence and no longer remain subservient to 'les sévères lois des hommes'. Such laws may be taken to refer to the authoritative words of the courtesy books, written for women. In terms which are not so different from those of a twentieth-century critic, such as Hélène Cixous, Labé closely associates writing with the notion of freedom:

Il me semble que celles qui ont la commodité, doivent  
employer cette honneste liberté que notre sexe ha autre fois  
tant désirée, à icelles apprendre: et montrer aus hommes le tort  
qu'ils nous faisoient en nous privant du bien et de l'honneur qui  
nous en pouvoient venir.<sup>9</sup>

By means of self-expression through writing, Labé believes that women may escape the male stereotypical image of themselves and achieve a personal glory, which belongs to them

alone. Her rejection of the traditional attributes of the female sex, the adornments which are gifts of men, indicates a refusal to be defined as an object of male desire. Indeed, her call for women to find an identity of their own, through the act of writing, shows her determination to escape definition as 'en-soi':

Et si quelcune parvient en tel degré, que de pouvoir mettre ses conceptions par escrit, le faire songneusement et non dédaigner la gloire, et s'en parer plustot que de chaines, anneaus, et somptueus habits: lesquels ne pouvons vrayement estimer notres, que par usage. Mais l'honneur que la science nous procurera, sera entierement notre: et ne nous pourra estre ôté (*Débat de Folie*, pp.3-4).

In one particularly fascinating passage of her preface, Labé advocates a personal literature for women, one which may act as a substitute for the imperfect memory:

Le passé nous resiouit, et sert plus que le present: mais les plaisirs des sentimens se perdent incontinent, et ne reviennent iamais, et en est quelquefois la memoire autant facheuse, comme les actes ont esté delectables. Davantage les autres voluptez sont telles, que quelque souvenir qui en vienne, si ne nous peut il remettre en telle disposicion que nous estions: et, quelque imagination forte que nous imprimions en la teste, si connoissons nous bien que ce n'est qu'une ombre du passé qui nous abuse et trompe. Mais quand il avient que mettons par escrit nos conceptions, combien que puis apres notre cerveau covre par une infinité d'affaires et incessamment remue, si est ce que, long tems apres reprenans nos escrits, nous revenons au mesme point, et à la mesme disposicion ou nous estions. Lors nous redouble notre aise, car nous retrouvons le plaisir passé qu'avons eu.... En oultre ce, le iugement que font nos secondes conceptions des premieres, nous rend un singulier contentement (*Débat de Folie*, p.5).

By placing her personal past into the written text, a woman may re-examine, and consequently challenge, the identity a male world has imposed upon her:

Nothing could more obscure the image of the ideal woman and wife than this sketch of a literary woman, who through self-representation has gained the power to reflect upon herself, to take note of change, to imagine that she might not be restricted by 'law' from attempting to construct a multifaceted personality that might actually use the ressources of fiction to gain social and political advantages.<sup>10</sup>

#### Within/Without the Household

In the first part of *Les Angoysses*, we encounter the protagonist moving within a limited and silent world. The actual physical universe of Part One is restricted to alternating

scenes between H  lisenne's house and the nearby church and law courts. In this part of the work, the reader becomes witness to the private domain of the Renaissance woman, defined so frequently in the courtesy literature already examined. Observing H  lisenne moving within the limited parameters of her universe, we also experience her stiflingly claustrophobic world. The feeling of being enclosed is heightened by the fact that events are related solely from H  lisenne's view point, from within the household. Thus, our notion of the world without is a fragmented one, constructed out of brief glimpses of life through an open window, or snippets of distant sound heard by the protagonist:

Moy estant ainsi tourment  e et travaill  e, j'ouy plusieurs instrumens, lesquels sonnoyent en grande harmonie et melodieuse resonnance (p.17).

The beginning of H  lisenne's adulterous relationship is marked by the opening of her bedroom window, from which she first sets eyes upon her lover. The majority of subsequent encounters between the protagonist and Guenelic occur as H  lisenne leans from this window to look down on the street below. The very opening of the window seems to signify a yearning for freedom, represented by the outside, male world. However, H  lisenne must remain in this rather ambiguous position, which situates her somewhere between the private and public domains. The public world into which H  lisenne gains limited access (the church and the court rooms) may be entered only when her husband's permission is obtained:

Il me fut conced   d'aller au lieu o   on plaidoyt les causes seulement accompagn  e de ma familiere damoyselle (p.73).

When H  lisenne's love for Guenelic is discovered, her domain becomes even more limited on account of her enforced imprisonment, firstly in her room and then in an isolated tower. Frustrated by her confinement ('en prison caligineuse', p.17), H  lisenne poignantly depicts herself as a wounded animal, locked in a cage:

Comme beste vulner  e et bless  e couroys au long de la chambre (p.35).

This part of the *Angoysses* is structured by repetitive sequences of events. Jean-Philippe Beaulieu notes that the action is marked by a recurring cycle which consists of H  lisenne meeting or seeing her lover; thinking over the situation; the husband's jealousy, and H  lisenne's lamentations (the sequence is repeated twelve times).<sup>14</sup> The monotony of the everyday reality of a Renaissance wife is suggested by the repetitive sequences of the text itself, which reminds us of the difficulty for women of writing a text 'about a person to whom nothing happens.... A person inhabiting a world in which the only reality is frustration or endurance' (quoted from Intro.2). The text of *Les Angoysses* does not perceptibly develop,

but its cyclic structure gives it an unlimited nature. In accordance with Hélène Cixous' description of the feminine textual body, Hélistenne's text is indeed without an end.

Part Two of the *Angoysses* marks a distinct change in the narrative, for the focus moves away from Hélistenne herself to depict the knightly adventures of her lover, Guenelic, and his friend, Quezinstra. With this shift in focus, the first person form which, until this point, has denoted the voice of Hélistenne, is now taken up by Guenelic. Underlining this change, the author informs us that she is now: 'parlant en la personne de son amy' (sig. 17 ro). Accordingly, the author must adjust her style to befit what she considers to be a masculine mode of expression. The transition from Part One to Part Two is paralleled by a movement out of Hélistenne's claustrophobic domain which consists of only her room, the church and the court. Part Two of the *Angoysses* transcribes a world of unlimited parameters. The two heroes visit numerous countries, often with exotic sounding names (e.g. Sirap, Goranflos, Eliveta, the Isle de Citharee) in search of Hélistenne, who is still locked in her tower:

Je veulx chercher tous païs habitables, en surmontant d'Ulixes  
les peregrinations, pour ma Dame retrouver (sig. n2 vo).

While the world of Part One was a distinctly feminine one, Part Two is equally masculine. The passages of internal monologue, characterizing Hélistenne's own account (see below), disappear at the end of the first part of the *Angoysses* and are replaced by true action, which now structures the narrative. A sense of freedom is felt through the geographical space covered by the male characters. We are now in the limitless masculine domain, where events are no longer as predictable as they were in Hélistenne's world. Part Two of the *Angoysses* may also be read as a celebration of male friendship. The female audience of Book One is, to a certain extent, replaced by Quezinstra, who becomes the receiver of personal confidences. In Part One, there is no equivalent close friend to alleviate the heroine's solitude. Her confession can only be to a distant, invisible and anonymous female audience. No doubt feeling less at home when handling a male voice, Hélistenne, as soon as Guenelic takes over the role of narrator, no longer displays the personal style of Book One. Conscious of her unnatural, male voice, Hélistenne seems to feel the need to depict what she perceives as a specifically masculine universe, that is, limitless, full of action and people, and with a distinctly epic style in the passages relating the characters' battles:

... en luy donnant si grand coup, qu'il luy fendit la teste iusques  
aux dentz (sig. n4 ro).

Hélistenne's evident discomfort in using the masculine first person is highlighted on several occasions, when she 'forgets' her role as Guenelic and momentarily slips back into her authorial voice:

Qui vouldroit rediger par escript la vertu et magnanimité des  
deux champions, seroit chose tresurgente de prier non  
seulement Calliope, mais toutes les neuf Muses (sig. v8 vo).

Many explanations have been attempted to explain the differences in style between Parts One and Two of the *Angoysses*. I believe the most convincing argument to be that of Jean-Philippe Beaulieu in his article 'La Dualité Structurale des *Angoysses*'. Beaulieu suggests that fantasy in Part Two provides the solution to the psychological 'cul de sac' of Part One.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, without a dramatic change in narrative, the repeated sequences of the first part of the *Angoysses* could continue ad infinitum, never reaching a suitable climax to permit the text to conclude. It is notable that Part Two of Hélienne's text, representative of a masculine mode of writing, has both a clearly defined beginning and end. The fantasy world of the second and third sections of the *Angoysses* may thus be regarded as the fictional text composed by Hélienne as she remains incarcerated in the tower. Viewed in this way, the freedom and space featuring in these later sections become explicable if we remember that they are written by an author yearning for release from her imprisonment. Parts Two and Three (where Guenelic finally discovers the whereabouts of Hélienne) may be described as conscious fiction in contrast to the first part, which seems to depict social reality. It is, therefore, literature which plays a liberating role, allowing Hélienne to escape her unsatisfactory existence by seeking refuge in a fictional world. Moreover, it is through the medium of fiction, that Hélienne is able to recreate the image of Guenelic. In Part One, Guenelic proves to be a cowardly and untrustworthy character, who is far from Hélienne's ideal picture of the male lover:

Je veoie manifestement son inconstance et imprudence (p.15).

At this point, Hélienne's vision of Guenelic as the ideal lover can take place only through her dreams:

Et certes le dormir me fut plus gracieux que le veiller, par ce  
qu'il me sembloit estre avec mon amy en ung beau jardin  
plaisant et delectable, et sans aucune timeur le tenoye par la  
main, et luy prioie qu'il fust prudent et discret, lui remontrant  
la grande doleance qu'il me causoit au moyen de ses  
importunitiez. Il m'estoit advis qu'il me respondoit que la faulte  
se devoit ascrire à amours qui par impatience le contraindoit  
à excéder les metes de raison.... me sembloit qu'interrompoie  
sa voix par souvent le baiser et accoller (p.72).

However, this dream world has its limitations and can be only a temporary escape for symbolically, on this occasion, Hélienne's husband interrupts the dream. Fiction, on the other hand, is a far more permanent means of realizing a fantasy. Accordingly, Parts Two

and Three of the *Angoysses* present a transformed Guenelic, who is now suddenly described as a writer:

Moy estant en ma florissante ieunesse, aagé de vingt ans, iestois en varieté de pensee, en vacillant par plusieurs fois pour ne sçavoir bien discerner lequel me seoit plus utile de m'occuper a l'art militaire, ou de continuer l'oeuvre literaire, auquel i'avois donné commencement (sig. m2 ro).

It seems likely that this piece of information stems from Hélienne's own literary vision, for, in Part One, no mention is made of such a role. Likewise, in the second part, the author goes as far as making Guenelic confess his own faults:

Helas moy pauvre miserable, qui trop tard cognois mon imprudence et inconstance, ie n'ay iuste cause de me plaindre d'amours (sig. m2 vo).

Thus, through the literary text, Hélienne is able to recreate her lover, forming him into the ideal male suitor. Moreover, in the consciously fictional world of the second and third parts of the text, Hélienne is given the opportunity of resolving the moral conflict which comes into play in Part One. At the beginning of the *Angoysses*, Hélienne is quite clearly in pursuit of a sensual and adulterous relationship:

Il [le religieux] me reprimera et blasmera ce que aultresfois luy a esté plaisant, en me pressant et stimulant de chasser amour sans en avoir jouyssance; et si je le croyoye, je n'auroye que la peine et tourment, sans ce qu'il me fust imparty quelque plaisir et delectation (p.39).

However, by the adoption (in Book Three) of Neo-Platonic ideals, Hélienne, as a married woman, finds a satisfactory solution to her love for Guenelic:

Si iusques à present d'une amour sensuelle tu m'as aymee, desirant l'accomplissement de tes iuveniles desirs a ceste heure de telles vaines pensees il te fault desister. Et d'autant que tu as aymés le corps, sois d'oresnavant amateur de lame, par charitable dilection. (sig. E5 vo-E6 ro).

In this way, fiction serves to turn an immoral love into a pure and blameless one. Thus, for Hélienne, literature has the purpose of idealizing and recreating her own world, permitting her to transform a dull reality into a more positive vision.

As I have already mentioned, Hélienne's universe, in Book One of the *Angoysses*, consists not only of her room, but of the nearby church and lawcourt. In fact, the whole of this part of the work is structured by a continual alternation between the public and private, masculine and feminine, domains. The narrative juxtaposition of these two separate domains

highlights their somewhat contradictory and conflicting characters. As soon as Héli-senne leaves the household, she enters a world which appears to be exclusively male and, in many ways, rather hostile to the female intruder. Passages of internal monologue, which serve to define the heroine's identity within the household, are largely absent from the more public scenes. Héli-senne's self-affirmation now becomes dependent on male recognition and judgement which concentrates on external appearance, denying her an inner-life. When in public, Héli-senne's identity, seen in existential terms, is transformed from 'pour-soi' into 'en-soi'. Thus, definition of the heroine lies in the hands of the male onlooker, who assumes a significant role in *Les Angoyssees*. His presence is characterized by his shameless scrutiny of the female protagonist as soon as she makes her appearance:

Tout le monde jectoit son regard sur moy, en disant les ungs aux aultres: 'Voyez là la creature excédant et oultrepassant toutes aultres en formosité de corps'. Et après qu'ilz m'avoient regardée, ilz alloient appeller les aultres, les faisant saillir de leur domiciles affin qu'ilz me veissent. C'estoit une chose admirable de voir le peuple qui s'assembloit entour moy; et quand je fuz parvenue jusques au temple, plusieurs jeunes hommes venoyent en circuit tout à l'entour de moy, me monstrant semblant amoureux par doulx et attrayantz regards tyrez du coing de l'oeil pour essayer de me divertir et decepvoir (p.22).

The voyeuristic gaze of the male public may remind us of the *blasonneur's* indiscreet examination of the female body. Indeed, the parallel becomes even clearer when we learn that the male onlooker fragments the heroine in much the same way as the *blasons*, drawing a distinction between body and face:

Quand me trouvoye en quelque lieu remply de grand multitude de gens, plusieurs venoient entour moy pour me regarder comme par admiration, disans tous en general: 'Voyez là le plus beau corps que je veis jamais.' Puis après, en me regardant au visaige, disoient: 'Elle est belle, mais il n'est à accompagner au corps' (p.3).

Observing the importance of physical appearance for recognition in the public eye, Héli-senne begins to identify with and deliberately mould her self-image on this male perspective. In order to understand exactly what defines her public persona, the protagonist frequently has recourse to the use of the mirror. Immediately after one encounter with Guenelic, Héli-senne's first thought is to rush to her mirror to examine the image which her lover has of her:

Incontinent que je l'euz veu, je me retiray ung petit, affin de prendre conseil à mon miroir de mon accoustrement, grace et contenance (p.12).

Not only does H  lisenne seem able to accept the definition of her identity by the male Other, but even appears to find this self-image rather pleasing:

... la douceur intrinsique que je sentoye de sa veue (p.12).

Quand je fuz accoustr  e, je commen  ay    me pourmener, en me mirant en mes sumptueulx habillemens comme le paon en ses belles plumes, pensant pla  re    aultres comme    moy mesmes (p.22).

A careful reading of the quotation above reveals a very interesting, albeit temporary, dissociation of the narrator from the protagonist. The phrase 'comme le paon en ses belles plumes', slipped in rather unobtrusively by the narrator, recalls the moralizing figure which appears in the bestiary as an illustration of pride. It would seem, therefore, that the narrator is here standing back from H  lisenne the character, in order to pass a moral judgement. Evidently, the narrator is displeased with H  lisenne's easy connivance with an unflattering male image of herself as an object of desire. The mirror is, of course, an important accessory of the Satrean world, where characters are frequently reminded that, having no true essence, they may exist only by means of definition by Les Autres:

JOHANNA, - Vous aviez l'air   pouvant  e.

LENI, *criant*. - Ce n'est pas vrai!

*Elle se reprend.*

JOHANNA, *doucement*. - Allez regarder votre bouche dans la glace: l'  pouvante est rest  e.<sup>13</sup>

Paradoxically, while in one sense representing a prison, H  lisenne's room may also be considered as a refuge and a place where, away from the public eye, she may openly express her feelings:

Me retiray en ma chambre o   j'estoys plus volontiers seule qu'accompagn  e, pour plus solitairement continuer en mes fantasieuses pens  es (p.30).

It is only within this private world of her room that the heroine may escape definition of herself by Others, and depict herself more in terms of her inner-life than her physical appearance. Although H  lisenne's room represents a place of refuge in which she may write, its security is threatened at all times by the intrusion of the husband:

Lequel en hurtant du pied par grande impetuosit   ouvrit l'huys de ma chambre, dont je fuz si merveilleusement troubl  e (p.30).

Scenes set within the household rely on the first person narrative, usually in the form of internal monologue. The phrase 'disant en moy mesmes' occurs throughout, underlining the



introspective nature of the writing. Action tends to be replaced by thought, for this is a text which is situated principally within the character's mind. It is the solitude of her room and of the tower which enables H  lisenne to put her literary talents to use. Remembering that it is the discovery of H  lisenne's book which provokes a further period of incarceration, we find the intriguing situation whereby writing becomes both the cause and the result of being imprisoned. The publication of *Les Angoysses* which, as we have seen, was most certainly intended by the author, offers H  lisenne a solution to the silence imposed on her; a means of entering the public domain without losing her identity as 'pour-soi'. However, a certain ambiguity arises when we consider that H  lisenne the character, being the very theme of the *Angoysses*, is perhaps in danger of becoming an object for Others; this time, a reading public, which may not be expressly selected. Hence, the true heroine of the *Angoysses* is perhaps, not so much the character herself, but the more elusive, and less easily definable figure of the writer.

#### The Silent Heroine

Alone in her room, H  lisenne's internal monologue consists of lengthy passages of self-analysis. In contrast, her spoken language is much less articulate; silence being a theme which recurs throughout *Les Angoysses*. In the presence of other male characters, H  lisenne seems unable to express herself in direct speech. During the course of the entire first part of the text, we repeatedly observe her failing to find her words:

Quand je voulois prononcer quelque propos par manieres de plainctes et exclamations, l'extreme destresse de ma douleur interrompoit ma voix (p.9).

At times, H  lisenne's form of communication is reduced to a series of screams or sighs which replace normal language:

... et sans s  avoir prononcer la premiere parolle pour luy respondre, je commen  ay    derompre mes cheveux et    violer et ensanglanter ma face de mes ongles, et de mon trenchant cry femenin penetroye les aureilles des escoutans (p.18).

Her subordination to her husband is suggested by the unequal passages of direct speech which appear in the text. The protagonist is given very little actual dialogue, especially when she is with her husband. When she does speak aloud, it is generally in reply to her husband, and rarely as the initiator of a conversation. One of the few times that H  lisenne does try to speak, she is prevented by her husband:

Ainsi que je proferoye telles parolles, les pensant continuer, il interrompit propos (p.32).

Unable to articulate her feelings in spoken language, Héli-senne's desire is expressed through a nonverbal language. Although unvoiced, her love becomes conspicuously visible in her facial expressions and gestures. These signs, a form of body language, are observed, 'read' and interpreted by the husband:

Mon mary estoit melencolieusement irrité de veoir mes gestes et contenance (p.12).

Thus, we see that women's hesitancy in speaking may lead them to rely on other forms of communication. Recent linguistic studies provide evidence to show that this silent form of expression is a characteristic specifically associated with the female sex:

Their facial expressions, pauses, and signs are more integral to their discussion than are men's.<sup>14</sup>

With Guenelic, Héli-senne seems to be at least partly freed from her aphasic state, for the pattern of dialogue is much more balanced, passages of direct speech being more equally distributed (this is particularly so in Part Three):

Il n'eust pas plus tost imposé fin a son parler que je luy dis.... (p.76).

Héli-senne's feelings are also translated by the elaborate use of the literary glance, 'le regard'. 'Le regard' becomes another mode of communication for the protagonist and action is often reduced to no more than a series of glances:

... et en regardant à l'autre part de la rue, je veis ung jeune homme aussi regardant à sa fenestre, lequel je prins à regarder ententivement.... Après l'avoir plus que trop regardé, retiray ma veue; mais par force estoye contraincte retourner mes yeulx vers luy (p.5).

In the first part of the *Angoysses*, this 'regard' may be equated with lust and adultery. Héli-senne's bold gaze marks a striking contrast to the advice, in courtesy literature, for women to keep their eyes chastely lowered and motionless ('l'égalité des yeux'). A moral reading may also be intended, for the reader may be expected to remember the numerous biblical quotations associating adultery and eyes:

... the lust of the eyes (1 John 2:16).

They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin (2 Peter 2:14).

The theme of 'le regard' is extensively developed in the first part of the work, where there are a great number of verbs related to sight. The theme is, of course, a well-established one, which was widely drawn on during the sixteenth century. However, it belongs very much to a tradition which envisages love from a male viewpoint, by picturing woman as the passive inspirer. If the theme of love at first sight plays such a prominent role in works of the Renaissance period, this may be attributed to the influence of Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, which was particularly popular at this time. The beginning of love is depicted by a description of a beam of poison or of arrows which are shot from the woman's eyes, and enter the poet, penetrating all of his limbs. An example of this process is found in the first lines of Scève's *Delie* (1544):

L'Oeil trop ardent en mes ieunes erreurs  
Girouettoit, mal cault, a l'impourveue:  
Voicy (ô paour d'agreables terreurs)  
Mon Basilique avec sa poignant veue  
Perçant Corps, Coeur, et Raison despourveue,  
Vint penetrer en l'Ame de mon Ame.  
Grand fut le coup, qui sans tranchante lame  
Fait, que vivant le Corps, l'Esprit desvie,  
Piteuse hostie au conspect de toy, Dame,  
Constituée Idole de ma vie.<sup>15</sup>

In *Les Angoysses* this theme is reversed, and woman's habitual role is contradicted as she becomes the more active, inspired partner. It is evident from the heroine's surprise at her new role, that we are no longer within an established tradition:

Mais je prenoye admiration, en moymesmes, de me trouver  
ainsi subjecte à regarder ce jeune homme, ce que d'autres  
jamais ne m'estoit advenu. J'avoys accoustumé de prendre et  
captiver les hommes, et ne me faisoye que rire d'eulx; mais  
moymesmes miserablement je fuz prise (p.5).

It is interesting to note the similarities between the above quotation and a passage from one of Louise Labé's elegies (1555). In both texts there is the same ironic twist when the woman moves from her accustomed role:

C'étaient mes yeux, dont tant faisais saillir  
De traits à ceux qui trop me regardaient,  
Et de mon arc assez ne se gardaient.  
Mais ces miens traits, ces miens yeux me défirent,  
Et de vengeance être exemple me firent.  
Et me moquant, et voyant l'un aimer,  
L'autre brûler et d'amour consommer;  
En voyant tant de larmes épanduës,  
Tant de soupirs et prières perduës,  
Je n'aperçus que soudain me vint prendre  
Le même mal que je soulais reprendre,

Qui me perça d'une telle furie  
Qu'encor n'en suis après longtemps guérie.<sup>16</sup>

Hélisenne is not always silent. However, when she does speak aloud, a distinctive feature of her speech is that it is never truthful. Her direct speech is characterized by a web of lies, which serve to protect and mask her true feelings. Like the female characters of the marriage satires, Hélisenne's speech with other male characters indicates her lack of confidence in them, especially when compared with the 'sincere' confession she is prepared to make to a female audience. Hélisenne's words to her husband are particularly deceitful, and often consciously thought out lies:

Trouvay une artificiele mensonge (p.8).

Quand il eust ce dict, commençay à mediter et penser, et disoye à moymesmes: 'Helas, je ne me sçauroye excuser, car ma lettre de ma main escripte rend cler tesmoignage de ma vie', puis je disoye au contraire.... (pp.31-32).

In Part One of the *Angoysses*, a sign that the heroine's relationship with Guenelic is at this stage unsuccessful, is found in the fact that she also lies to him, coquettishly feigning not to love him and concealing her husband's jealousy. When Hélisenne and Guenelic meet in Book Three, the change in their relationship is represented by a more truthful discourse between them, for Hélisenne no longer needs to mask her thoughts by lies. Thus, we see that, within the limits of her own consciously fictional world, Hélisenne has no need to tell lies to men.

### Bitextual Writing

In contrast with the inarticulate spoken language of Hélisenne the character, the author proves to be extremely erudite. *Les Angoysses* draws extensively on literary sources, including Jean Lemaire de Belges' *Les Illustrations de Gaule et Singularitez de Troye*, translations of Boccaccio's *La Complainte des Tristes Amours de Flamette* and Caviceo's *Le Pérégrin*. However, Hélisenne does not always successfully interweave her borrowings into her own narrative. Her rather exaggerated use of mythology often strikes a false note when juxtaposed with passages of a more intimate narrative style. These contrasting styles of *Les Angoysses* may be said to represent both the feminine and masculine modes of writing; one personal and inward-looking, the other reaching out to external influences. Hélisenne does little to disguise her sources, often reproducing long, unaltered quotations within her text. One comparison with Lemaire may suffice to illustrate Hélisenne's overt reliance on masculine, literary sources:

Tout subit defaillit la vigueur de mon cueur, et par passionnée fascherie enclinay mon chef en terre comme fait une violette sa couleur purpurine quand elle est abbatue du fort vent Boreas (p.15).

Defaillant la vigueur de son noble coeur, passionné dextreme angoisse, enclina le chef en terre, comme fait une belle violette sa couleur purpurine, quand elle est abatue du fort vent Boreas (*Les Illustrations*, II.111).

In this case, and in many of her other borrowings, Hélienne's use of her sources is not as straightforward as might seem at first appearance. The simile, which the author has selected from Lemaire, originally referred to Oenone's grief when abandoned by her legitimate husband. Lemaire's choice of this simile, indicative of his sympathy for Oenone, clearly suggested that the reader was to adopt a moral reading. In *Les Angoysses*, the same simile is used for a very different purpose, now conveying the protagonist's suffering, as she learns of her lover's indiscreet behaviour. The author's intention here is somewhat ambiguous. Her reference to *Les Illustrations* is so undisguised that she would certainly expect her reader to recognize it. Therefore, it seems possible to believe that, by turning our thoughts to a well-known example of conjugal chastity, the author is encouraging us to compare Hélienne's conduct with that of Oenone. Another example of Hélienne's ambiguous use of her sources is a passage which misappropriates a biblical quotation. The verse in question is by the evangelist John, which is taken up by Hélienne to describe her joy as she catches sight of her lover:

Mais comme une femme enceinte, laquelle est persecutée de griefves et excessives douleurs devant la naissance de l'enfant, mais incontinent qu'elle voit son fruict, la parfaicte joye et liesse où elle est reduicte luy faict oublier les peines precedentes, et aussi la suavité et douceur intrinsique que je recepvoye du delectable regard de mon amy me faisoit oublier tous mes travaux et fatigues preteritz (p.34).

When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you (John 16: 21-22).

The quotation from John reports the words of Christ, as he reassures his disciples of his own resurrection. These words placed in the mouth of a wife contemplating adultery seem irreverent, if not blasphemous. Are we, therefore, being urged to condemn Hélienne? Such a stance would be strangely contradictory to the intention of the narrator, which is to persuade the readers to offer the protagonist their sympathy. Perhaps the situation is more complex,

where the readers are left with the freedom to decide for themselves; either to take up the allusions inherent in the author's careful choice of sources, or to ignore this invitation to adopt a moral reading of *Les Angoysses*, and be lulled by the narrator's persuasive rhetoric.

One of the most notable characteristics of Hélienne's style is her use of long complex sentences:

Au temps que la déesse Cibeles despouilla son glacial et gelide habit et vestit sa verdoyante robe tapissée de diverses couleurs, je fuz procurée de noblesse, et fuz cause à ma naissance de reduyre en grand joye et lysesse mes plus prochains parens, qui sont pere et mere, par ce qu'ilz estoient hors d'esperance de jamais avoir generation (p.2).

She tends also to add superfluous adjectives to her narrative, often in pairs of synonyms:

J'estoye debile et de petite complexion (p.8).

Chargé de tristesse et melencolie (p.8).

... et qu'amours le presseroit et stimuleroit d'investiguer et cercher (p.12).

The text of *Les Angoysses* contains a large number of Latinisms which add to its overall old-fashioned feel (e.g. 'mancipe', p.28; 'altissime', p.27; 'aurigateur', p.84; 'sanctimonie', p.84). This somewhat over-erudite and highly refined style is underlined by a comment made by Claude Colet, the editor of an edition of *Les Angoysses*, which appeared in 1550. In a prefatory letter to a group of noble ladies, Colet describes how he has 'translated' Hélienne's work into a more easily comprehensible and modern French:

Et sur ce propos me monstrastes les Angoysses et autres compositions de ma dame Hélienne de Crenne, lesquelles, pour l'obscurité de beaucoup de termes dont elle use en icelles, ne pouviez bien entendre.... vous me priastes de rendre en nostre propre et familier langage les motz obscurs et trop aprochans du Latin, à fin qu'elles vous fussent plus intelligibles.<sup>17</sup>

Hélienne's rather awkward mingling of her own material with borrowings from a masculine tradition may recall the idea that women 'underdo or overemphasize everything to such an extent their behaviour almost seems a caricature: the traditional fate of oppressed who try to "pass for" oppressors' (quoted from intro.2). Commenting on Hélienne's use of intertextual references, Beaulieu associates such a technique with the feminine process of creating a literary text:

One could also explain this phenomenon by positing the necessity for the woman narrator, Hélienne, to make use of pre-existing texts by well-known male writers in order to constitute

a text, thus expressing new contents with older, already canonized means. The intertextuality would therefore be the justified product of a *démarche scripturaire féminine*, the first step of which would be imitation of male texts.<sup>18</sup>

Earlier, I discussed how writing may become a particularly self-conscious act for the female author. It is surely this very preoccupation with the art of literary composition which provokes a rather too carefully studied style of writing. We may therefore conclude that one of the results of women's awareness of speaking out of turn is that they may attempt to compensate for this rebellious voice by trying almost too hard in their writing.

2. Marguerite de Navarre: *La Coche*

Marguerite de Navarre's narrative poem, *La Coche*, was probably composed between 1540 and 1541.<sup>19</sup> Like many of Marguerite's works, the text was not published immediately, but first appeared in 1547, as part of her poetic anthology *Suyte des Marguerites de la marguerite des princesses* (Lyons: Jean de Tournes). This delay between composition and publication may be explained by the fact that Marguerite does not seem to have written expressly for publication, but to have envisaged writing more as a private activity to be shared only with a close circle of friends. It is no doubt also for this reason that the titles of many of her works (such as the *Heptaméron*) are not her own, but ones added later by her publishers. *La Coche* is one of a small number of secular poems written by Marguerite. The poem recounts a debate, on the subject of love, between three ladies, each of whom relates her own suffering in order to determine which of the three is the most to be pitied. The first lady complains that although he still claims to love her, her lover's affection is no longer genuine. To make matters worse, she has discovered that she is now admired by the second lady's suitor. The second lady laments the departure of her faithless 'amy', while the third, unable to see her friends suffer alone, has deliberately left her own devoted lover. Debates on the theme of love, such as this one, were extremely popular in France from about the twelfth century onwards. Indeed, the framework of *La Coche* is not entirely original. Marguerite seems to have modelled the poem on a fifteenth-century debate by the writer Alain Chartier (*Le Livre des Quatre Dames*), whose name is even quoted in *La Coche*:

Pensé en moy que c'estoit ung subject  
Digne d'avoir ung Alain Charretier (ll.50-51).

Marguerite may also have been influenced by Christine de Pizan's *Le Debat de deux amans* and *Le Livre du dit de Poissy*. However, in spite of working within the traditional structure of a medieval debate, *La Coche*, as will be seen below, remains a personal work onto which Marguerite prints the stamp of her own character.

The Writer in the Text

Many of Marguerite de Navarre's works begin by depicting a situation in which the narrator or protagonist is in some kind of turmoil (see Chapter 5, Section 1). By means of speaking, and therefore writing, the narrator seeks to move out of this anxious and despairing frame of mind to a more positive state of being. *La Coche*, providing no exception to this rule, opens on an emotional wilderness. The narrator, who is identified as being Marguerite



herself, specifies that the reason for her despair is the total absence of love from her life and even her memory:

Ayant perdu de l'aveuglé vainqueur  
Non seulement le sentement du cuer,  
Mais de son nom, dictz et faictz la memoire  
(ll.1-3).

Chartier's *Le Livre des Quatre Dames* also begins by focusing on the narrator's melancholy. However, in Marguerite's case this solitude is equated with a loss of creative ability. At the beginning of *La Coche*, the therapeutic act of writing is denied to Marguerite, who suffers the traditional writer's block, removing the medium by which her anxiety may be relieved:

Ayant perdu le pouvoir et la gloire,  
Et le plasir de la doulce escripture,  
Où tant je fuz incline de nature (ll. 4-6).

The manner in which Marguerite defines writing recalls similar words found in Louise Labé's *Débat de Folie et d'Amour*, where she envisages the act of writing as 'la gloire... l'honneur, le plaisir' (p.5). It seems significant that both women speak of writing in terms of the pleasure they derive from it. For Marguerite, the loss of her creative energy appears to be the direct cause of her low-spirited mood at the outset of *La Coche*. In the first lines of the poem, we witness the narrator escaping to an isolated park in order to avoid any company:

Me desrobay, comme femme non lasse,  
Hastivement, pour n'estre point suyvie,  
Car de parler à nul n'avoye envie (ll.24-26).

Her withdrawal from society underlines her negative state of mind at the beginning of the text. Gradually, throughout the poem, Marguerite moves back into court life, and society in general. This reinstatement is represented firstly by her gesture of friendship towards the three ladies:

Si je ne puis au moins vous conforter,  
Je souffriray par grant compassion  
Avecques vous la tribulation.  
Vous estes troys, il vault mieulx estre quatre  
(ll.100-103).

and secondly by the ride back to court in her coach. The coach is therefore important, not only as a practical means of restoring Marguerite's public persona by linking two contrasting places, one of solitude and one of a community of people, but as a symbol for the transition from one psychological state to another. The resolution of the narrator's original dilemma is seen especially by her rediscovery of poetic inspiration. In fact, *La Coche* culminates with

the writing of the actual text we are reading. By the end, the desire to write has become so great that Marguerite sets pen to paper as soon as she has left the three ladies:

La nuict me feist aux troys donner l'adieu,  
Non pour dormir, mais pour trouver ung lieu  
Où, sans avoir de nul empeschement,  
Peusse acquitter ma promesse et serment  
(ll.1320-23).

The 'plaisir' of composing a literary text is regained and, aware of the reader's reaction, Marguerite expresses concern that the act of reading should be as pleasurable as the process of writing:

Et je seray trop plus qu'elles contente,  
Si mon labeur, lequel je vous presente,  
Vous donne autant, en lysant, de plaisir  
Qu'en l'escrivant j'en ay eu de desir  
(ll.1386-89).

Like Hélienne de Crenne's *Les Angoysses*, *La Coche* is as much about the author's struggles to write, as it is about a love intrigue. As narrator, Marguerite has a constantly shifting role, serving as comforter, arbiter, and a kind of prompt for the three ladies. However, her most important role by far is that of author. It is principally on account of her talents in the literary domain that the ladies choose to confide in Marguerite:

Las! ce n'est pas par doubte de secret  
Que nous craignons compter nostre regret,  
Lequel voudrions estre par vous escript  
(ll.107-9).

Their request is a somewhat hesitant one, for even they have noticed Marguerite's recent apathy:

Mais nous voyons maintenant vostre esprit  
Si paresseux, si fasché ou lassé  
Que ce n'est plus celui du temps passé  
(ll.110-12).

Such fears prove to be unfounded, for the ladies themselves have provided the stimulus necessary to free Marguerite from her inactivity, and she reassures her companions that she will not disappoint them:

... je reprendray la plume  
Et feray mieulx que je n'ay coustume  
(ll.121-22).

However, to be able to compose the text required of her, Marguerite must encourage the ladies to relate their stories: 'Si le subject me voulez descouvrir' (l.123). Indeed, throughout *La Coche*, we witness Marguerite urging the ladies to speak, ever-conscious that if they do not, the text cannot be formed: 'Si ne parlez, je n'ay garde d'escrire!' (l.130). The language of the three ladies is, in fact, a typically feminine, nonverbal one; their pain expressed only by the shedding of tears:

Parquoy en pleurs voulurent reveler  
Ce que le temps les contraignoit celer,  
Et de lermes et souspirs feirent langues  
Pour achever sans parler leurs harangues  
(ll.1009-12).

Unlike H  lisenne who, when faced by her husband, is unable to transform her nonverbal expression into articulate, spoken language, the ladies in *La Coche* may make this transition on account of their total confidence in their sympathetic, female listener. Nonetheless, Marguerite's task is a difficult one, requiring patience to urge the ladies constantly to abandon their 'body language':

Pour Dieu tournez le pleur qui vous affolle  
A descharger vostre ennuy par parole  
(ll.131-32).

While offering comfort to her companions, throughout *La Coche*, Marguerite listens to their debate with a view to converting the spoken word into a written form. Moreover, when the ladies do speak, it is Marguerite's job to order and control the discourse, as, for example, when night falls: 'Contraincte fuz d'empescher le discours' (l.993). Thus, the intriguing situation arises whereby, as readers, we witness the author at work in search of material for the very book we are reading. We are present at the moment when she is inspired by her subject matter, and follow her through *La Coche* as she gathers the necessary ideas for her text. The book, in its finished material form, is observed at the end of the poem, as it is handed over to its first reader, the Duchesse d'Etampes: 'Or le prenez' (l.1390). Marguerite's vision of the book as an object fits in with the notion of modesty already seen when H  lisenne de Crenne spoke of publishing her book. Far from perceiving her book as a commercial, and therefore public object, Marguerite entrusts the finished book to one reader alone who, as will be seen below, has been carefully selected by the author herself.

### Female Speech

*La Coche* provides a clear illustration of the importance of speech for the creation of a literary text. Initially uninspired and listless, Marguerite seeks, above all, to withdraw from

normal speech communion: 'de parler à nul n'avoye envie' (l.26). It is only through her conversations with the three ladies that her desire to write is rekindled. In fact, the whole of *La Coche* takes its structure by absorbing and reshaping the primary (simple) forms into a secondary (complex) genre (see Intro.1). The poem is therefore built on a framework of speech, every voice of which is a female one. The value of speech in the poem is made apparent by Marguerite's careful distribution of different speech forms to each of the three ladies.<sup>20</sup> The first lady speaks in 'terza rima', the three-line stanzas suiting her extended portrait of the inseparable friendship of the *three* women ('Nous sommes troys...' etc., l.144). The second lady also speaks in three-line stanzas. However, the first line in each group contains only four syllables, which marks a contrast with the other two decasyllabic lines. Cottrell suggests that the shorter first line, disrupting the unity of the rhyme pattern (a-a-a, b-b-b), communicates the rupture and discordance of the situation of the lady whose lover has abandoned her. Finally, the third lady speaks in quatrains which, in some ways, represent her desire to unite the group of three with her own lover, to form a foursome:

Mon amy seul, qui en vault plus de troys,  
Sera des troys amy. O quel lien  
Qui quatre cueurs unira sans moyen  
En ung voulloir! Helas, je le vouldroys!  
(ll.619-22).

The use of different versification seems, therefore, to parallel the meaning of each of the ladies' speeches. Moreover, it also serves quite simply to draw the reader's attention to the dialogic element in *La Coche*, indicating that we are in the presence of three (or four, if we count the narrator) distinctly different female voices. Of the physical appearance of these ladies, we know almost nothing, their characters being affirmed solely by the voices they are given. Unlike *Les Angoysses*, *La Coche* has no male onlooker to deny the ladies their authenticity, by transforming them into icons of feminine beauty. On the contrary, *La Coche* may be read as a re-evaluation of female speech. Marguerite's description of the ladies' speech points to both its elegance and eloquence, contradicting the commonplace idea of women's language (especially in all-female circles) as gossip and trivial:

Ce livre auquel mon escripture efface  
Tout le plus beau et la meilleure grace  
De leurs propos, desquelz j'ay bien suyvie  
La verité, mais la grace et la vie  
Qui est dedans, je l'ay toute souillée  
(ll.1340-44).

... leurs propos, que je trouvoys trop cours,  
Car je n'ouï oncques femmes mieulx dire  
(ll.994-95).

In one sense, *La Coche* may be viewed as a kind of game for, throughout the text, the ladies compete with each other in persuading the reader to pity them most of all. Unlike the game found in the *Courtisan*, *La Coche* does not surround this playing with laughter, but with tears. More to the point perhaps, where women were 'disqualified' from participating in the ludic contest of *Le Courtisan*, here, women are granted the freedom to debate, vying with each other for the position as victor. The competitive spirit of the poem begins with the narrator's desire to hear the ladies' troubles in order to compare them with her own:

Qui me feist lors desirer sçavoir  
Si pis que moy elles povoient avoir  
(ll.57-58).

It is the first lady who opens the game of persuasion by her provocative request:

... Telle est ma maladie  
Que qui a pis souffert que moy le dye  
(ll.359-60).

Accordingly, the second lady claims herself as winner of the game:

Je sens, dist elle,  
Cent et cent foyz douleur aspre et mortelle  
Plus que ne faict, point ne fault que le cele,  
  
Nulle des deux  
(ll.375-78).

As the game advances, the players become progressively more aggressive:

Comment, comment?  
Soustenez vous estre plus grant torment  
Doubter l'ouy ou non de vostre amant  
(ll.745-47).

Finally, the game seems to go sour, as the element of play almost vanishes altogether:

La tierce, oyant leur gracieux debat,  
Plus par ennuy que par plaisant esbat  
Dist... (ll.867-69).

The persuasive nature of each of the three ladies' speeches causes the debate to remain static, for quite clearly no one speaker has the rhetorical advantage over another. In all of the three speeches made by each lady, the same points are reiterated. No conclusion is reached, either by the ladies or by Marguerite herself, and without the intervention of an outsider the situation seems to have no foreseeable end:

Je leur requis vouldoir ung juge prendre

Qui leurs debatz voullust et peust entendre.  
 Car aussi tost que l'une j'escouttoys  
 De son costé soubdain je me mectoys;  
 Et puis, quant l'autre avoit compté son cas,  
 A qui ne fault bailler nulz advocatz,  
 Je me rendoye à son opinion  
 (ll.1039-45).

*La Coche* thus constitutes another example of the potentially endless, circular text. In order to break the circle, the intimacy of the female group must be shattered and the text made public. It is no doubt for this reason that the ladies have chosen Marguerite as their confessor, aware that she may serve as intermediary between them and the public world. The very fact that the ladies ask for their words to be written down and their case judged (the verb 'juger' occurs persistently) suggests that their speech is motivated by a double intent; first of all making an intimate confession while, in addition, keeping in mind a wider audience, who will judge their speeches as a rhetorical debate. Unable to formulate a fair judgement, Marguerite can do no more than promise to give an exact rendering of the debate:

... ma puissance  
 N'espargneray à donner congnoissance  
 De leurs ennuyz comme leur ay promis,  
 Sans qu'un seul mot de leurs dictz soit obmis  
 (ll.1051-54).

Here, Marguerite seems to be pointedly refusing the male role as judge, while claiming an identity as a writer who is not judgemental. Her insistence that *La Coche* will give an exact report of the debate indicates her rejection of the traditional male rhetorical mode which calls for either high praise, or vituperative criticism. Such a stance may also be part of the overall modesty topos for, by claiming her role to be no more than that of a scribe, Marguerite undermines the importance of her own literary imagination. The same theme will also be observed in the works of Gabrielle de Bourbon (see Chapter 5, Section 2). The very fact that Marguerite avoids resolving the outcome of the debate is significant. As in the discussions following the tales of the *Heptaméron*, she seems to be calling on the readers to take an active role in judging the dilemma for themselves. She is, therefore, reluctant to expose her own opinion, leaving the readers the freedom to continue the debate outside the limits of the text.

#### In a Woman's World

Men are conspicuously absent from *La Coche*. In fact, one of the themes of the work may be said to be the discussion of this very absence.<sup>21</sup> However, it is, no doubt, the intimacy of the all-female group which permits such free talk, for all the women speak

eloquently and at length. At the beginning of the poem, Marguerite encounters a peasant with whom she exchanges a number of banal pleasantries:

La m'arrestay en luy demandant comme  
L'année estoit et qu'il en esperoit,  
Qu'il avoit faict, qu'il faisoit, qu'il feroit  
De sa maison, femme, enfans et mesnage,  
De son repos et de son labourage  
(ll.28-32).

The rather superficial nature of this mixed-sex conversation comes to light when compared with the more serious and intimate discourse of the group of ladies. It is interesting to note the typically feminine role played here by Marguerite in keeping the conversation going by eliciting male speech (see Intro.1), while being asked to reveal nothing of herself. Indeed, the artificial and even forced character of the conversation is conveyed by the halting rhythm of the dialogue, reported in the form of a list. With the arrival of the three ladies, the male intruder is cast out and mixed-sex speech is rejected:

Il vous seroit, Madame, mieulx duisant  
Parler à nous qu'à ce fascheux paisant  
(ll.69-70).

The park, and in particular the coach (which shelters the ladies from the rain and takes them home), symbolize a kind of no-man's-land, situated somewhere between the two defined male and female domains; a terrain where women may speak openly of their most private thoughts: 'Et ne craignez privéement parler' (l.105).<sup>22</sup> This pervasively female atmosphere is brought to light by a comparison with Chartier's *Le Livre des Quatre Dames*, where the narrator is a man. Moreover, Chartier's narrator does not know the women he meets, whereas Marguerite describes the ladies as her closest friends:

Je congneu lors que c'estoient les troys dames  
Que plus j'amyois (ll.77-78).

In *La Coche*, the narrator is touchingly affectionate with the speakers to whom she offers her comfort:

Moy qui la veis en si cruelle peine,  
Je pris ses mains à frotter et tenir  
(ll.656-57).

Indeed, the relationship between author, narrator and characters is a close one, indicated by the fact that the author endows the narrator with her own name. In *La Coche*, the narrator serves a double role, relating the events, as well as participating herself as a fourth character. The theme of female friendship is of utmost importance. The celebration of friendship

between women is rare, even in works by female writers, who often tend to portray their heroines as isolated or lonely characters (such as Hélienne in *Les Angoysses*). Cottrell describes how in the sixteenth century, friends sometimes exchanged vows of friendship called 'alliances', whereby they promised to come to the aid of the other whenever help was needed.<sup>23</sup> The three ladies in *La Coche* do indeed seem to be joined by a vow of friendship of this kind, for the narrator speaks of them as a 'trinité, sans nulle difference' (l.84). Likewise, the first lady describes their relationship as follows:

Nous sommes troys dont le reconforter  
Impossible est, car sans nostre amytié,  
Sans mort tel mal ne scaurions supporter

L'une de l'autre a egale pitié,  
Egale amour, egale fantasie,  
Tant que l'une est de l'autre la moyctié

Entre nous troys n'y eut onc jalouzie  
Oncques courroux, oncques diversité:  
Si l'une a mal, l'autre en est tost saysie.

Du bien, aussi de la foelicité  
L'une n'en a que l'autre n'y ait part,  
Pareillement part en l'adversité  
(ll.144-55).

The unity of the group of three is emphasized by Marguerite's use, not only of the three-line stanza, but of patterns of three in the actual vocabulary (the repetition three times of 'egale' and 'oncques'). It is also notable that each lady makes three speeches within the duration of the work. It is likely that without the absence of men, such female friendship would not be formable, for in a more normal situation, women would probably be discouraged from creating a bond which releases them from the obligations of the traditional feminine role.

In searching for an appropriate judge of the debate, the ladies are, in fact, seeking the ideal reader for Marguerite's work. It is surely not by chance that the person finally chosen to judge the debate is a woman, the Duchesse d'Etampes. As a female, the duchess will judge Marguerite's writing kindly, implying that she will not impose male critical standards:

Excusera mes ignorantes fautes  
Et servira de douce couverture  
Sa grant bonté à ma povre escripture  
(ll.1301-3).

Before settling on the choice of the Duchesse d'Etampes, the ladies had first proposed the king for this role. Marguerite's unequivocal rejection of this choice may be accounted for, partly by her modesty in front of such an important figure, and, perhaps, because she fears his judgement as a man:



Quant je la vey choysir si haultement,  
 Crainte me print en luy disant: 'Vrayement,  
 Si devant l'oeil d'un si parfaict esprit  
 Falloit monstrier mon trop mal faict escript,  
 Vous pourriez bien prendre ailleurs secretaire.  
 J'aymeroyz mieulx me desdire et me taire  
 (ll.1113-18).

By means of selecting the king's mistress as judge, Marguerite is confident that the book will reach her brother's eyes, for the duchess will serve as intermediary and defender of women's writing:

Et l'escripture aura pour son appuy  
 Celle qui peult la deffendre de blasme  
 Et l'excuser comme une oeuvre de femme  
 (ll.1311-13).

Marguerite's modesty in the presence of the king forms part of a topos which continues throughout *La Coche*. In most works by male writers, this topos occurs at the beginning or end of a text and rarely has a ring of sincerity. In Marguerite's case, reference to her inadequacy as a writer permeates the whole of *La Coche* and appears to be linked with her initial loss of literary inspiration. The frequency of her apologies seems to turn what is normally a commonplace rhetorical device into a major theme. Moreover, her frustration at her creative limitations seems genuine, as is often the case with women writers:

Moy donc qui suis des escrivans la moindre  
 Et moins que rien (ll.1127-28).

Thus, writing finally resolves the narrator's initial dilemma of which mention is no longer made. It is, no doubt, Marguerite's notion of writing as a means of personal therapy which accounts for her preoccupation with the problematics of writing. *La Coche* may be defined as an implicitly feminine text, not solely because of the number of themes and parallels it shares with other texts by women writers, but also on account of its all-female cast. As will be seen, this pervasively feminine atmosphere is particularly evident in the next text I shall examine: Jeanne Flore's *Comptes Amoureux*.

3. Jeanne Flore

The *Comptes Amoureux* and *La Pugnition de l'Amour* were printed in the first half of the sixteenth century under the authorship of a certain Madame Jeanne Flore.<sup>24</sup> In spite of numerous attempts to unravel the mystery surrounding the author, both her identity and gender remain an unsolved enigma.<sup>25</sup> Flore is almost certainly a pseudonym, for its mythological resonances assimilate it to the names of the narrators present in the matrix of the *Comptes* such as Cassandre, Minerve or Andromeda. The name Flora seems to conjure up both the ancient divinity presiding over spring flowers and the famous Roman courtesan. Thus, whether deliberate or not, the author's chosen pseudonym implicitly suggests the idea of youthful beauty as well as unbridled physical love; both of which play an important role in the *Comptes*. The very questioning of the author's gender is symptomatic of a general mistrust of women's ability to write. It has frequently been insinuated that works by numerous women writers, including Madame de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*, were actually written by men. Debate over the writing of the *Comptes* has suggested a number of hypotheses, including the possibility of mixed authorship or a group of female contributors. Arguments put forward for a male authorship of the *Comptes* tend to centre on the idea that the subject matter reflects a masculine and not a feminine way of thinking. If this were so, the author would be playing a deliberate game with his readers, appearing as 'a wolf in ewe's clothing'.<sup>26</sup> I do not believe this to be the case, and for the purpose of this study, I shall assume that Jeanne Flore is a woman. The problem of gender need not be over-emphasized, for what is really of importance is that the author's intention is to write from a female viewpoint for a female audience. Consequently, I intend to highlight certain aspects of Flore's writing which I consider to be distinctly feminine, while viewing the ambiguities underlying the *Comptes*, less as proof of a male authorship, than as representative of the difficulties experienced by a woman writer when handling a subject which belongs to a tradition as inherently masculine as love does.

Tales for Women

The *Comptes Amoureux* consists of a series of tales related by different female narrators, gathered together for the grape harvest. The structure of the work immediately recalls Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which is, in fact, an important source for the *Comptes*, providing not only a suitable framework for the storytelling, but the actual material for the whole of the fifth tale.<sup>27</sup> The *Comptes* may also be compared with Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*, which it precedes, of course, by a number of years. However, one of the most

obvious differences separating both the *Decameron* and the *Heptaméron* from the *Comptes Amoureux* is the latter's use of an all-female group to serve as storytellers. Moreover, in a letter at the beginning of her work, Jeanne Flore makes clear her intention for the readers of her book also to be exclusively women:

Je me suis advisée que je feroys chose tres agreable et plaisante aux jeunes Dames amoureuses, lesquelles loyaulment continuent au vray service d'Amour, et lesquelles se delectent de lire telz joyeux comptes, si je les faisois tout d'ung train gecter en impression (p.97).

Throughout the *Comptes*, we are constantly reminded of this female audience, for the narrators address the listeners as 'mes dames', 'amoureuses dames', 'cheres amyes', and so forth. This specification of a particular readership does in fact seem to be a characteristic of many sixteenth-century women writers who were, no doubt, eager to avoid any possible male criticism. Thus, as in Marguerite de Navarre's *La Coche*, the world of the *Comptes* is a feminine one, where the male reader must surely feel himself to be in some way an outsider, intruding into an intimacy which links together author, narrators, female characters and female readers. In the *Comptes*, the close relationship between the author and the narrators is confirmed in the initial *epistre*, where Jeanne Flore declares herself to be the cousin of one of the narrators ('Jeanne Flore à Madame Minerve sa chiere Cousine', p.97). The letter also implies that the author herself was originally involved in the storytelling which she now wishes to record in writing (although none of the existing *comptes* is signed with her name). A direct link also exists between the narrators and the female characters, blurring any strict demarcation separating the tales from the matrix they are set in. Indeed, the very choice of mythological names for the narrators breaks down the 'reality' of the narrative framework, distinguishing it from the *Decameron*, where the names (Elissa, Lauretta, Emilia etc.) place the narrators in a contemporary Italian context. Throughout the *Comptes*, Flore's narrators express their empathy with the female characters of their tales, often interrupting their own account to forward a personal reflection. The frequent use of 'nous' which seems to refer to women in general, creates a bond between the narrator and female character, closing the distance between the story and the narrative matrix even further. One such example occurs in the seventh *compte*, when Briolayne Fusque comments on the jealous husband who threatens to kill his wife if he discovers her to be unfaithful<sup>28</sup>:

Car comme vous congnoissez (mes dames) là n'est le moyen plus court aux mariz pour nous garder d'aymer, et plustost diray je, ce sont incitemens davantaige à porter amour plus eschauffée en la chose deffendue et prohibée (p.221).

Another illustration of the all-inclusive 'nous' is found at the beginning of *compte* 4, where Madame Minerve reminds us that the unsuitable marriages featuring in almost every tale are also a common occurrence in sixteenth-century society:

Le plus souvent nous sommes par le vouloir et choix de noz  
parens jointes par l'adamantin lien de mariage à vieillars  
chanuz qui ont jà ung pied en la fosse: et avec ces corps de  
glace nous sommes contrainctes user nos malheureux ans  
(p.167).

The comments of the narrators ensure that the reader will be carefully guided in her interpretation of the *Comptes*, urged into reading the tales from the same perspective as the narrators themselves. The reader who is able to enter into this privileged rapport with the author, narrators and characters is aware of taking up a position in a closed circle, of moving into the somewhat claustrophobic world of sixteenth-century women, as they unite by telling stories to each other.

The intimacy of the all-female circle is broken at the end of the fifth tale with the arrival of 'six jeunes hommes Lyonnais'. Until this point in the text, the stories have been narrated in fairly rapid succession. However, suddenly, the feeling of urgency to move onto the next tale is relaxed as the new arrivals temporarily distract the narrators from their storytelling. Extended descriptions of the group's pastimes are inserted into the narrative matrix and our attention is no longer focused solely on the *comptes* themselves. Following the model of Boccaccio, at this point Flore introduces a description of the garden where the storytelling has been taking place:

Adoncques yssirent de la salle eulx s'entretenans deux à deux  
par les mains: et cheminans au long d'une tonne tapissée  
naturellement de verdure et roses de rosiers fleurans comme  
basme, arriverent en ung jardin grand et spacieux: au meillieu  
duquel sailloit une belle fontaine d'eau vive et argentine toute  
environnée de divers arbres.... (p.194).

The passage is remarkably similar in tone to an earlier description of Narcissus' fountain occurring in the fourth tale. It would seem, therefore, that the atmosphere of sensuality, which pervades all the individual stories of the *Comptes* is, here, spilling over into the narrative framework; a change which must surely be accounted for by the appearance of the six men. The presence of men in a hitherto female group seems to have a particular effect on the nature of the tales told after their arrival. If we are to accept the hypothesis that the first *compte* originally came after the fifth one, then it is interesting to observe its similarities with the sixth and seventh stories.<sup>29</sup> Tales one, six and seven certainly display characteristics which are not present in the other stories and which may perhaps be explained by remembering the new mixed-sex audience. All three of these tales draw extensively on the

chevaleresque and epic. In both one and six, we witness knights battling with giants, serpents and dragons, in order to release some imprisoned maiden. The epic nature of the sixth *compte* is underlined by the author's designation of the character Helias by the phrase 'preux et vaillant Chevallier', as well as her use of traditionally exaggerated accounts of battles:

Luy bailla tel coup Helias, qu'il le fendit jusques au nombril  
(p.202).

Thus, the female narrators display considerable flexibility in their ability to adapt their style in such a way as to present a speech form which might elicit male approval. This same technique of convergence, used in order to present a more masculine style, was also seen in the different parts of Hélienne de Crenne's *Les Angoyssees*, suggesting perhaps that bitextual writing is a common feature of works composed by women. While it is true that the arrival of the men disrupts the unity of the all-female group, it is interesting to note that the men are given no place in the actual storytelling. The role assigned to them is a marginal one, that of silent listener, never fully integrated into the joyous atmosphere of the company. We are, after all, in a woman's world, where the first concern is to appropriate the freedom of speech, which is more usually a male privilege. Therefore, even the reactions of the male listeners are passed over in silence; no facial expressions or gestures being recorded. However, at the end of the sixth tale, we learn that the men have made preparations to leave the group, possibly indicating that they are ill-at-ease in their position as eavesdroppers on what may be termed as a kind of feminine ritual:

Sur ce voulurent prendre congé les jeunes hommes survenuz, et  
jà estoient les chevaux bridez en la court (p.215).

The men's departure is immediately prevented by the female narrators, whose forceful behaviour strikes a note of contrast with the characteristically passive feminine role:

Adoncques toutes'les Dames se mirent en devoir de les arrester  
et mesmes madame Salphionne cependant faict desrober les  
selles aux chevaux (p.216).

Thus, like the 'clerc' in *Les Evangiles des Quenouilles* (see Chapter 3, Section 2), the men in the *Comptes* are forced to listen to stories related by women. In each work, women are obliged to exert some kind of force in order to retain their male audience. In the case of the *Comptes*, the speech heard by the male listeners is far from trivial. Indeed, like *La Coche*, the *Comptes* presents a challenge to the notion that when women speak together the subject matter will more than likely be based on gossip. Flore's desire to valorize female speech is made immediately obvious by her detailed descriptions of the narrators' delivery of their tales. Aspects of delivery such as voice quality, gesture and movement constitute one of the

five parts of traditional rhetoric (pronuntiatio). However, Flore is careful to point out that her narrators, while concerned with the effect of their speech, are not subscribing to a masculine manner of speaking:

Madame Andromeda gentille et Amoureuse femme se composa en geste propre, et advenant, puis avec une jolie et gracieuse mode foeminine va ouvrir sa vermeille bouche suafvement redolente (p.133).

All of Flore's narrators speak eloquently, drawing extensively on mythological reference. Such a display of erudition is particularly striking when found in the context of the *conte*, which is more ususally of a ribald nature. Eager to reveal her learning, Flore is rarely satisfied with forwarding one mythological allusion at a time, and tends to offer a series of two or more different comparisons:

Ce disant, à la belle les lhermes pluvoient des yeulx en si grande abundance, qu'on estime que les pleurs de l'amoureuse Biblis furent beaucoup moindres: ne Venus tant ne fut douloureuse en la mort de son Adonis (p.109).

Passages with particularly elaborate analogies occasionally cause the reader to lose the thread of the actual narrative and have laid the author open to a certain amount of criticism for her 'écrasante érudition mythologique'.<sup>30</sup> Pairs of synonyms decorate Flore's writing, occurring throughout the whole of the *Comptes*: 'desarmé et sans espee' (p.189); 'tout esmerveillé et estonné' (p.186); 'la paour et craincte de la fille' (p.191) etc. This tendency towards overemphasis was also seen to be a feature of Hélienne's writing and may therefore be used to support the hypothesis that Jeanne Flore is in fact a female writer.

### The Sect

The narrators of the *Comptes* may be compared to a sect, declaring its allegiance to a divinity. Not surprisingly, in a work where women play a predominant role, the patriarchal, Christian God is rejected and replaced by the female deity, Venus. References to Venus abound in both the narrative matrix and the tales themselves, where Venus is worshipped by the characters in much the same way as the Christian God:

Humblement à genoux estoit en continuel prier vers la bonne Deesse Venus qu'il luy pleust briefvement la getter hors de celle calamiteuse vie (p.106).

Moreover, the goddess is rarely depicted without her son Cupid, suggesting a clear analogy with the Virgin Mary and Christ:

Tourna ses divins yeulx misericors vers Amour son filz, auquel elle dit en ceste façon: 'O filz Amour, ma seulle force et puissance, duquel sort toute mon auctorite!... O mon filz, si les miens ennuyes te sont (comme certes ilz sont) aulcunement griefz et pesans, je te prie pourveoy, et donne secours à mon humble Servante' (pp.106-7).

The vocabulary of the *Comptes* is often of a deliberately religious nature. Whenever love is mentioned, it is capitalized and sometimes termed as 'sainct Amour'. Every one of Flore's tales is motivated by the same goal, which is outlined in the very title of the work: 'Comptes amoureux... touchant la punition que faict Venus de ceulx qui contemnent et mesprisent le vray Amour'. As the title suggests, the narrators are united in their aim, not only to urge women to indulge in amorous relationships, but even to threaten them with punishment for refusing such pleasures. However, this sect has a heretic in its midst: Madame Cebille, who stubbornly resists the temptations of love. In spite of the associations with speech which her name brings to mind (sibyls), Cebille is never actually given a voice in the book. In this way, Madame Cebille is relegated to the silent status of the six men who join the group. Her refusal to participate in the feminine creed underlying the *Comptes* is punished by the other narrators, who deny her the privilege of free speech. Indeed, excluded from the feminine discourse, Cebille must revert to an inferior form of expression: the 'body language', generally used by women solely in the presence of men. Her reactions, although not stated in spoken language, are 'read' and interpreted by the other women:

Elle veit Madame Cebille attaincte du remort de sa conscience, et espouvantée des justes et rigoureuses punitions d'Amour, paslir et muer couleur, et prendre tel visaige consterné de je ne sçay quelle paour panique (pp.128-29).

Frequent references to Cebille's 'acerbe accusation à l'encontre de la sacrosainte divinité d'Amour' (p.101) reveal that in a part of the text which is now missing, Cebille has not always been silent and was probably responsible for setting off the chain of tales which seek to defend love. Consequently, as the narrators defend their cause, their language is polemical and almost legalistic in its terminology:

Prendre la deffence en main (p.101).

Soustenans le party amoureux (p.101).

It is the task of each narrator to persuade and eventually convert the one dissenter of the group to the beliefs of the majority. Therefore, as the text exists in its present form, we are presented with only a single viewpoint and left in no doubt as to how we are to judge the situations which arise in the tales. The absence of a voice of contention lulls the reader into

readily accepting a world where all normal values seem to be reversed. This biased presentation of love becomes particularly apparent when compared with the plurality of views found in Marguerite's *Heptaméron*. In the *Comptes*, the attention of the reader is directed onto the tales themselves, rather than onto the linking matrix. The extended discussions which the *Heptaméron* inspire are necessarily absent from a text where the narrators share a common way of thinking, and relate tales which are all variations on the same theme. For this reason, the narrators in the *Comptes* lack the individuality of the *Heptaméron* storytellers and have, quite accurately, been described as interchangeable.<sup>31</sup> It is, in fact, this united group, with their rigid doctrine of free love, which serves to render the *Comptes Amoureux* so effectively persuasive. Indeed, a complex rhetoric of persuasion underlies Flore's text, which sets about converting Madame Cebille as well as, more generally, any other dissenters amongst the reading public. As far as Madame Cebille is concerned, the persuasive intent of the narrators is only partially effective; certain stories causing her to turn pale with fear. However, the heretic is never fully converted and refuses to enter the sect with the other narrators:

Madame Cebille seule demeuroit sans s'esbayr, tournant le tout  
à fable et à mensonge (p.192).

It must, of course, be remembered that Cebille's dissension is essential, for her conversion would curtail the storytelling, by removing the need to persuade.

### Seducing the Reader

One of the most successful means of persuasion employed by Flore is the device of seduction. The world of the *Comptes* is a particularly attractive and enticing one, where an atmosphere of gaiety reigns. In her introductory letter, Jeanne Flore states her intention for her work to amuse her readers, for these are indeed 'joyeux comptes'. Throughout the text, there is repeated mention of the 'vendanges', which provided the original motive for the gathering of the narrators. These insistent references to the grape harvest seem to demand a comparison with a kind of bacchic festival. Such an analogy is confirmed in the first tale, where Bacchus and Venus are presented as complementary figures:

L'esbat amoureux est plus douce chose, si le Dieu Bacchus y  
adsiste et est present (p.141).

The light-hearted tone of this 'festival' is sustained by the presence of constant laughter (a technique already observed in Castiglione's *Courtisan*):



Les dames ne se peurent tenir adonc de rire en oyant ainsi parler madame Minerve (p.168).

In contrast to the rather ascetic nature of the traditional feminine domain, the stories of the *Comptes* are all set against a backcloth which is both sensuous and erotic. Flore's careful evocation of this lullingly pleasant atmosphere is far from gratuitous and serves to draw the reader into a long chain of physical sensations. Nowhere is this more evident than in the fourth tale, where Flore describes the scene around Narcissus' fountain. By deliberately painting a backcloth which conveys the idea of fertility, abundance and freshness, the author seeks to awaken Narcissus' (and, by implication, the reader's) hitherto dormant senses:

Et le lieu d'alentour fut tout ordy d'herbe belle et druë, et par dessus la couvroit le naturel rocher, d'où elle prend sa sorce, que aucun rinceau ne la vint à troubler. Et aultre quelque chose ne tumba oncques dedans, tant estoit elle pure, necte, et coye. Puis la vallée fut richement peuplée de divers arbres comme mirthes et lauriers verdissans, et le terroer estoit depeinct de diverses et belles fleurs blanches, violettes et bleues, et d'autres de mille especes: lesquelles ont une vie eternelle par les fraiches undes qui arrousent le lieu de tous endroitz (p.177).

A similar atmosphere of sensuality pervades a passage in the first *compte*, which depicts the bed prepared by Venus for the young lovers. The scene exudes a sense of comfort, softness and exoticism, which mirrors the pleasures about to be taken:

La coicte fut du douët des cignes et pigeons, oiseaux amoureux et estans en la tutelle et garde de la Déesse: les courtines furent d'ung veloux cramoisi faictes en broderie, où y avoit figurés force myrthes, qui sont arbres dediez à Venus: les pendans et rideaux estoient d'ung fin taffetas de couleur celeste tout semé par dessus et dedans d'estoilles d'or (p.123).

Thus, we are encouraged to adopt a reading of the *Comptes* which seems to rely more on a physical response of the senses than an intellectual appraisal. In this way, Flore seduces her readers, lulling them into an easy acceptance of her creed of love. Not surprisingly, in a universe which seeks to relegate logic or reason as secondary to the senses, speech (in the stories themselves) becomes subordinate to the visual aspect:

Tu as, ô Beaulté, plus de force en ung seul moment devant les yeulx des amoureux, que n'a pas la douce Eloquence seulle de soy (p.117).

Indeed, the tales of the *Comptes* represent a mysteriously silent world, where the characters rarely converse. Instead, the tales concentrate on physical descriptions, external appearance being all-important. As a consequence, Flore seems to perceive eloquence primarily as

beautiful sound, focusing our attention on the aesthetic qualities of the voice rather than on the actual meaning of the words spoken:

Ainsi parlant, rompoit les parolles avec aulcunes douceurs: si que proprement sembloit sa voix instrumens de plusieurs chordes musicalement accordées (p.137).

A brief look at one of Jeanne Flore's most important sources may highlight the sensuous nature of her writing. For her description of the character Rosemonde, in *compte 1*, the author draws her details from the portrait of Venus in Book One of Lemaire's *Les Illustrations*. Like Hélienne de Crenne, Flore makes no attempt to disguise her borrowing, seeming almost to wish her reader to recognize her source:

Quand le doux vent Zephirus venoit à entresoufler parmy ses habillemens, ores il demonstroït à qui le voulait veoir, la composition de la cuisse, ores du ventre, et ores de sa jambe longuette et bien faicte (p.122).

Quand le doux vent Subsolanus ventillant pressoit iceux habits contre ses precieux membres, il faisoit foy entiere de la rotondité diceux, et de la solidité de sa noble corpulence (*Les Illustrations*, I.241).

It is certainly not by chance that Jeanne Flore selects, for the *Comptes*, one of the most sensual passages of *Les Illustrations*. However, where Lemaire's description of Venus is part of an allegory to be interpreted by the reader, in order to unveil the 'fructueuse substance', Flore's intention is solely to construct an image of beauty, with no allegorical layers of meaning. Thus, by using a moral text for an amoral purpose, Flore indirectly rejects the patriarchal morality which underlies *Les Illustrations* (see Chapter 3, Section 1). The importance of the visual element in the *Comptes* becomes especially apparent when the plots of individual stories are examined. In most of these, the development of the story is reliant on visual encounters of some kind. For instance, in the first tale, the sight of Rosemonde's beauty is sufficient to act as a catalyst for Andro's sudden love:

Le fort Andro en l'heure, luy qui soloit chasser et prendre les bestes saulvaiges, se trouva surprins de celluy, à la force duquel aucun pouvoir n'est qui puisse resister. Il se plante là attentif, comme s'arreste ung, qui en cheminant rencontre chose qui merite qu'on retienne ses pas: il dresse l'oeil au lieu d'où desjà depend le tendre fil de sa vie: il contemple la grande beaulté de la Damoiselle, et quasi s'entreoblie (p.108).

Likewise, in *compte 5*, we witness Nastagio's scheme to win over an uninterested lover. Rather than indulge in persuasive rhetoric, Nastagio has recourse to a visual mode of persuasion, making his lady witness a scene which 'converts' her:

Si grande fut la paour conceüe de la cruelle vision, mais neantmoins veritable, que affin que l'inconvenient ne luy advint aussi, le lendemain envoya une sienne secrette chamberiere par devers son amy Nastagio, et par icelle luy manda qu'il print pitié d'elle, et que jà trop se repentoit de l'avoir faict tant endurer (p.191).

Of all the stories in the *Comptes*, the fourth perhaps provides the clearest illustration of the visual nature of Flore's text, for the whole plot hinges on Narcissus becoming enamoured with his own reflection:

Attentif va contemplant avec ung subtil et amoureux regard l'excellente beaulté (p.178).

The characters in the tales of the *Comptes Amoureux* are not alone in falling a prey to their physical impulses. Seduced by both the joyful atmosphere of storytelling and the constant appeal to the senses, we also, as readers, may easily be caught in the narrative trap and initiated into the religion of love.

#### L'Impareil Mariage

The *Comptes Amoureux* is headed with the traditional modesty topos:

Soubs espoir que vous, et les humains lecteurs excuserez le rude et mal agencé langage. C'est oeuvre de femme, d'où ne peult sortir ouvrage si limé, que bien seroit d'ung homme discretz en ses escriptz (p.97).

In spite of the fact that the terms used by Flore are remarkably similar to those of Hélienne de Crenne in her *Angoysses*, in the case of the *Comptes* the author's use of this well-established custom presents something of a paradox. Such submission to tradition stands in direct contrast to the general manner in which the author of the *Comptes* deliberately flaunts her rejection of traditional precepts within the text itself. We may perhaps explain this rather blatant anomaly by judging Flore's use of the topos as playfully sarcastic. Interpreted in this light, Flore becomes a fore runner of Catherine des Roches, who, later in the century, questions the traditional use of the modesty topos, refusing any such apology, while courageously facing up to her critics:

Je fuiray la commune façon de la plus grand part de ceux qui escrivent, lesquels ont accoustumé de prier les lecteurs d'avoir les oeuvres pour agreables, comme s'ils vouloient par leurs courtoisies mendier les faveurs.... S'il y en a qui les reprennent avecques juste occasion, j'essairay de me corriger tirant profit de leur censure: si quelques uns en jugent sans advis et

discretion, je penserois estre sans discretion et advis de m'arrester à leur jugement (*Oeuvres*, pp.53-54).

The reader who takes Flore's modesty at face value is in for a shock when embarking on a reading of the *Comptes*. Contrary to expectations, Jeanne Flore's work may be read above all as an extremely bold challenge to the ideal of feminine behaviour, proposed by sixteenth-century courtesy literature. In many ways, *Les Angoysses* also represents a rejection of the traditional feminine role. However, less outspoken than Jeanne Flore, Hélienne seems to feel obliged to conceal her ideas behind a façade of contrition.

The world of the *Comptes* openly and unashamedly turns traditional values upside down, reversing the patriarchal, Christian morality of the treatise writers. In Chapter One, it was seen that the female behavioural model revolves around the central concern for chastity. In the *Comptes*, the author reacts against this precept by turning her work into an exaltation of physical love. Flore's characters are encouraged to behave in a way which seems quite contrary to social norms in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, the author does adopt what we may term as a personal morality to replace the Christian model she is rejecting. While condoning adultery, Flore does insist that physical relations should only be enjoyed when a couple is in love:

Est tres grande la beatitude que je sens, quand ores je me veoy  
prendre la fruition de cestuy vostre excellent et celeste corps:  
non par fraulde, mais par la bonté seulle et vertu d'Amour  
(p.127).

Any mention of sexuality in courtesy literature is almost always linked with procreation and *never* spoken of in relation to female pleasure. Treatises dealing explicitly with sexual relations tend to centre on restraint and moderation in the physical act:

Gardez vous bien de user trop de vos plaisances charnelles  
avecques vostre femme (*Lesnauderie*, f.i vo).

Moreover, such works never envisage physical relationships outside the institution of matrimony. In contrast, the *Comptes* present a world where it is *only* outside marriage that sexual pleasure may be achieved. Marital relations depicted in the *Comptes* all show repulsive portraits of impotent old men unable to satisfy their young wives:

Mais enfin n'eust elle aultre par sa malle adventure, fors que  
son flegmatique vieillard luy bava dessus sa venuste face, et  
vermeille bouche: si qu'on eust dict qu'une lymace avoit trassé  
dessus. Ne elle oncques ne peult tant faire avec ses petulantes  
gesticulations, ne pour luy faire boyre bruvages à ce preparez  
expressement qu'il se reschauffa, ou commeust, sinon qu'enfin  
elle le contraignit à cracher et à toussir, dont l'haleine sembloit  
l'exhalation d'ung retraict (p.161).

Consequently, the *Comptes Amoureux* attempts to define women's sexuality outside the limits of marriage. For the first time, we may observe sexual desire from a woman's viewpoint, as Flore does not hesitate in granting her female characters the liberty to scrutinize the male body:

La belle Dame, qui auparavant se mouroit entre les impotens et sans chaleur accollemens de Pyralius, maintenant s'esjouyt de manier les membres refaictz et en bon point de son nouvel amy, et de veoir sa belle et bien colourée face: ses vers yeulx: sa blonde barbe: sa poitrine forte, et plaine de chaleur: ses bracs non rudes au delieueux exercisse d'amours (p.125).

Indeed, the exaltation of physical love is undoubtedly the most important theme of the work, providing an overall unity to the different stories:

Tuttavia l'impressione globale che si ricava dalla lettura è quella di una fondamentale unicità: essa deriva dal tema dominante dell'opera, l'amore fisico.<sup>32</sup>

The sexuality of the characters in the tales is conveyed by means of abundant use of metaphors. Flore seeks to contrast the dull, sterile caresses of old husbands with the inflamed desires of the young lovers by bringing into play metaphors of coldness, sterility and immobility (where key words such as 'froid', 'sans chaleur', 'glace' or 'esteincte' are repeatedly employed) alongside metaphors of activity, movement and intense heat (e.g. 'enflammée', 'allumé', 'feu', 'flammes', 'ardeurs' etc.). In Chapter 1, Section 1, it was noted that structures of thought in the medical domain tend to associate women with cold and moist humours which have rather unfavourable implications. In the *Comptes*, coldness and moisture become the specific attributes of old *men*. The depiction of women as hot and dry thus presents a challenge to these established medical commonplaces where heat is synonymous with perfection.

The rejection of chastity in the *Comptes Amoureux* is directly linked with a protest against marriage. It will be remembered that courtesy literature bases its precepts for women solely in relation to marriage, prescribing behaviour for the bride-to-be, the wife and the widow. Marriage is a theme which occurs in all the *comptes* and a close examination reveals that it is always portrayed as oppressive and unfavourable to women. In the author's address to the reader at the end of the work, she makes a clear declaration of her views:

Je blasme icy l'impereil mariage:  
Aussi de vray est il bien à blâmer,  
Quand il en vient ung fruit tant fort amer  
Que le solas, par la disconvenance  
Des Mariez, se tourne en desplaisance  
(p.225).

Criticism of marriage is hardly a new theme in the sixteenth century and tends to be a predominant argument of works of the *Querelle des Femmes*, which attack the female sex. The originality of the *Comptes* seems to lie in a new alliance between a pro-women attitude and criticism of matrimony; two notions which had hitherto appeared incompatible. The only marriages we witness in the *Comptes* are, in fact, those between old men and young girls, whereas, significantly, marriage has no place in the relationships between young lovers, who apparently achieve their happiness outside the bonds of marital love. In the first *Compte*, as the lovers are finally united, we are simply told that:

Les amoureux en joye et liesse à l'ayde d'Amour jouyrent  
longtemps de leurs plaisirs (p.128).

The fifth story is particularly useful in highlighting Flore's rejection of marriage. The tale, taken from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, follows its source quite closely until the very end. In Boccaccio's version, marriage is the goal to be attained by the character Nastagio:

And so, acting as her own intermediary, she announced to her father and mother, to their enormous satisfaction, that she would be pleased to become Nastagio's wife. On the following Sunday Nastagio married her, and after celebrating their nuptials they settled down to a long and happy life together (*Decameron*, p.462).

In altering her source at this point, Flore makes a very clear stand against marriage, which she cannot envisage as part of the plan for her lovers:

Par ce moien obtint Nastagio de ses douces amours la  
jouyssance (p.191).

As well as painting vivid portraits of unsuccessful marriages, every so often, Flore also makes allusions to the bitter social reality of the marital conventions of the sixteenth century. Sometimes the characters themselves serve as a mouthpiece for the author, as in *compte* 1, where Andro is made to voice criticism against his lady's parents, who had chosen, for their daughter, a husband whose senility made the match ridiculous:

Je le veoy: desormais seront jointes les craintifves biches avec  
les chiens limiers, et les gryphons auront paix avec les jumens  
et chevaulx! (p.110).

Other comments are made by the narrators themselves, who direct criticism at marriages which are contracted for wealth, regardless of the incompatibility of the couple:

Et pource qu'il estoit fort riche et des plus apparens de la ville,  
les pere, mere, et parens d'elle furent assez tost contens de la  
luy promettre et bailler à femme, par ce moyen estimans qu'elle

seroit moult heureuse, et qu'ilz vouldroient beaucoup de telle affinité. La jeune Damoiselle estoit de l'aaige de quinze ans, et Pyralius de soixante six.... Pensez, amoureuses compaignes, quel fut lors celluy mariaige entre deux personnaiges si mal convenans en toutes qualitez (p.103).

Allusions, such as these, to the social conditions for women in sixteenth-century France remain tentative and discreet, almost as if the author hardly dares emphasize the link between her world of fantasy and the 'real' world which has inspired it. Indeed, at the end of her text, Flore undermines any serious interpretation of the *Comptes* by declaring the whole text to be nothing but pure fantasy:

Je t'ay voulu pour la conclusion  
Bien advertir que tout ce est fiction  
De poésie. Et pour ce donc ne gloses  
Point aultrement en mon oeuvre les choses  
Qu'elles ne sont, à mon desavantage (p.225).

Another indication of Flore's conscious use of fiction lies in her choice to relate stories within a narrative framework. By creating a fiction within a fiction, the author does, to a certain extent, compel her readers to suspend belief for the duration of the tales. This emphasis on fiction becomes even more apparent when the *Comptes* are compared with the stories of the *Heptaméron*, of which, in Marguerite's words, there is 'nulle nouvelle qui ne soit véritable histoire' (pp.47-48). Flore's creation of a deliberately fictional world does, in one sense, recall the second and third parts of Hélienne de Crenne's *Angoysses douloureuses*. Both women seem to use writing as a means of escape into a world of illusion and fantasy which may have allowed temporary respite from their limited existence. Flore's redefinition of female sexuality is, of course, only acceptable within the limits of fiction:

C'est en créant un univers de fiction qu'elle plaide pour l'avènement d'une réalité transformée. Rêver la vie était sans doute, dans les années 1530, la forme la plus aisée de la protestation, souhait d'une évasion illusoire plus que revendication.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, her insistence that her work is divorced from reality ('tout ce est fiction de poésie') indicates the author's awareness of a need to safeguard herself against any possible criticism. However, in her desire to disguise her highly controversial message, Flore runs the risk of 'sugaring the pill' to such an extent that her voice of protest will be drowned in a world of joyous fantasy.

### Tales from Men

A study of the individual tales of the *Comptes Amoureux* brings to light certain ambiguities which seem to contradict the message of freedom propounded by the narrators in

the narrative framework. Flore's narrators advocate subscription to love as a means of achieving freedom from an oppressive patriarchal morality. However, the female characters in the stories of the *Comptes* are far from liberated. Having entered the limits of Flore's fictional universe, the reader soon discovers that women are accorded the same traditional sex-roles which feature in works composed by male writers. While the male characters tend to be defined by valorous acts, the females remain passive observers of male heroism. It has been remarked that in the *Comptes*, we continually encounter the image of the barrier or obstacle (in the form of ditches, walls, bridges and so forth) which need to be crossed or destroyed in order to free women from the confines of the feminine domain.<sup>34</sup> The female character of the tales is therefore highly dependent on male bravery to allow her the possibility of a new lifestyle. Such is the case in the first tale, where Rosemonde waits helplessly for a young lover to release her from her imprisonment in a securely guarded castle. Similarly, in *compte* 6, we find a clear illustration of the contrast between male activity and female passivity. As the character Helias battles with giants and serpents, his lady is pictured as a motionless onlooker:

Piteuse chose estoit le contempler de la Damoiselle  
Fleurdelise: sa contenance après long pleurer estoit comme ung  
qui condamné à mourir veoit l'exécution de ses complices: elle  
ne meust ne pied ne jambe: de rigueur presque elle enroidit, et  
prent la forme de celles statues transformées en l'aspect du chef  
de la Gorgonne (pp.201-2).

Thus, we find ourselves, yet again, in the presence of the reified woman, who seems to bear an unmistakable resemblance to the emblemist's vision of the ideal woman as statuesque. Moreover, this link with the emblem seems to be confirmed by a description, in the first tale, of the consummation of Andro and Rosemonde's love:

Il estoit merveilleusement resjouy de luy manier le ventre uny  
et dur, comme on veoit es statues de l'ouvrage de Phidias,  
excellent tailleur d'ymaiges (p.126).

The description of Rosemonde may also recall the techniques of the *blasonneurs* in whose hands woman is transformed into an art object created out of plastic materials:

Ses mains délicates, et blanches comme albastre (p.126).

Ses cuysses bien tournées (p.126).

Indeed, the entire passage portraying the various limbs of Rosemonde's body draws on the set details already seen in the *Blasons Anatomiques*:



En premier lieu il consideroit l'amplitude et spaciosité de son clair front bein arondy, les surcilz plus noircissans que nul jayet etc. (p.125).

In this scene, we witness both lovers delighting in the contemplation of each other's bodies. However, Rosemonde's reactions are passed over rather hastily, before a long extended passage is included in order to depict Andro's scrutiny of the female body:

L'heureux Andro ne sçavoit bonnement se satisfaire à la speculation de si elegant et bien composé corps: tant l'avoit songneusement formée la souveraine Ouvriere Nature (p.126).

The sexual act, in this instance, is much more of a shared experience than in the male-dominated *blasons*. Nonetheless, Flore seems unable to speak of physical relations without slipping into an inherently masculine mode of expression. Consequently, the scene is depicted in terms of pursuit and conquest, relying heavily on the traditional metaphors of war:

Est tres grande la beatitude que je sens, quand ores je me veoy prendre la fruition de cestuy vostre excellent celeste corps.... O la victoire mienne aujourd'huy incomprehensible!... L'heureux Amant se teust, et commença de faire ses approches près de la forteresse amoureuse. Laquelle longuement ne peult souffrir la batterie qu'elle ne se rendit (p.127).

In *compte* 4, we are presented with the intriguing situation whereby we observe women attempting to don the masculine role of pursuit. Before approaching the heartless Narcissus, the love-stricken nymphs 'rehearse' their unfamiliar role as initiators of the amorous discourse:

Pensant de se retrouver devant luy, avec prieres pitoiables, et persuasions artificielles, repetoient à part elles en quelle sorte luy descouvroient leurs doulces et ardentes amours (p.172).

However, as soon as they find themselves in Narcissus' presence, they seem unable to sustain a masculine position and fall back into a traditionally feminine, aphasic state:

Et telle se sentoît estre pleine de glaçons, qui estoit de vehemente ardeur et hardiesse toute auparavant remply. Une aultre ne sçait que paslir à tous propos: et l'aultre, que proroger le desir, qui l'opresse: l'aultre las! ne sçait sinon demeurer muette sans parler en attente que aultruy luy preste la hardiesse de s'avancer (p.173).

This loss of speech is a feature of many of the female characters of the *Comptes*, who are surprisingly silent in comparison with their eloquent narrators (a contradiction also observed in Hélienne's *Angoysses*).<sup>35</sup> The figure Echo, appearing in the fourth tale, epitomizes the

limited role played by female characters in Flore's text. Condemned to repeating the words of others, Echo is denied any voice of her own. Another instance of the 'gagging' of the female sex occurs in the sixth story, where Fleurdelise submissively accepts her role as silent listener:

Sur ce, mes dames, voulut Fleurdelise interrompre le propos de la damoiselle Daurine... mais Helias qui avoit grand desir d'ouyr la fin, luy pria de se taire. 'Mamy, dict il, laissez la achever, je vous prie.' La dame qui l'aymoit plus que soy mesmes obeit et se teust, dont poursuyvit ainsi la damoiselle Daurine (pp.209-210).

From the examples above, we see that Flore's female characters are stereotypical, 'en-soi' figures and not the authentic, 'pour-soi' characters which we might have expected to find in a work by a woman writer.

Much of the ambiguity of the *Comptes* stems from the fact that women who refuse to play the passive role of femininity are regarded as outcasts, deserving severe castigation. By freeing women from the constraints of a Christian morality, Flore can only substitute a female deity who is as omnipotent and oppressive as the Christian God. Characters in the tales are given no free choice; they either worship Venus or are punished, as is the case in the second *compte*. Aware of the power of her beauty, the character Meridienne deliberately cultivates an image of herself as a feminine icon. Playing on the weaknesses of men, she uses her own sexuality as a means of acquiring a dominant position with the male sex. As in the *Angoysses*, the mirror becomes of central concern to the protagonist. However, where Hélienne strives principally to gain approval from her masculine audience in order to reaffirm her own identity, Meridienne's intention is to use her beauty as a kind of snare for the hapless male:

Laquelle beaulté... vouloit faire monstre, et en captiver les coeurs des jeunes hommes, pour d'iceulx après... liez et garrottez des chordes de desir amoureux (p.135).

Described as a spider waiting to trap the fly as it becomes entangled in the web, Meridienne presents herself as an object of desire, deliberately displaying her naked limbs as bait with which to allure the male admirer:

Ne craignoit de laisser veoir les membres de son excellent corps nudz et decouvers (p.136).

Ignoring the precept which demands that women keep their eyes to the ground, the character relishes in casting her poisonous gaze onto her male victims. Indeed, while retaining the traditional image of the basilisk as a cause of love (see my quotation of Scève in Section 1 of

this chapter), the description of Meridienne's 'regard' underlines her new role as active, rather than passive inspirer of male love:

Estoit fort joyeuse et contente de veoir ainsi l'imprudent jeune homme se perdre en la lueur de ses beaulx yeulx, ressemblante au serpent appelé Basilique, qui occit quinconque il aura attainct de son regard venimeux' (p.140).

Meridienne is one of the few female characters in the *Comptes* who are accorded the liberty to speak, which she does with surprising eloquence:

Et pas n'eust sceu à mon advis, la femme de Marc Anthoine lorsqu'elle desploya les forces de son parler pour à soy rendre captif qui venoit pour la subjuguier soubz l'empire Romain, la surpasser d'eloquence et bien dire (p.137).

The comparison is an appropriate one, for it was Cleopatra's 'de-masculinizing' influence which caused Mark Anthony to lose the Roman empire. Seen in terms of the image of the hunt, Meridienne represents the untameable animal ('indomptable', p.147) which cunningly escapes the clutches of the huntsman:

Tout ainsi que la beste saulvaige poursuyvie et chassée dens le boys, soigneusement fuyt le veneur demandant sa vie: ainsi la dame se destournoit de Pyrance (p.148).

However, her refusal to espouse the traditional role of femininity necessarily encompasses a rejection of love which, in the world of the *Comptes*, is a punishable offence. Much like the irascible God of the Old Testament, Venus appears to the heretic, warning her of retribution: 'portant la face austere et terrible, d'ire et courroux enflambée' (p.135). Meridienne is accused of religious dissension and termed as 'irreverente' (p.135) for refusing to worship the marble replica of Venus, representative of the archetypal objectified woman:

Au meillieu de ce beau Temple fut posée l'ymaige de la Déesse avec ung merveilleusement beau artifice et superbe, faicte de marbre prins en l'isle de Parus (p.142).

The punishment inflicted upon the dissenter is the disfiguring and destruction of her perfect body:

Or le deschyrement et laniation du deplorable corps estoit hydeux et trop espoventable à regarder.... Las! C'estoit voyrement droicte pitié de contempler sa face deschirée aux griffes des cruelz et furieux animaux, et les cheveux de son chief froissez, arrachez, et souillez de sang entremeslé de pouldriere et ordure (pp.152-53).

Such a fate may remind us of the rending of the female limbs in both the *Contreblasons* and the lives of the female saints (see Chapter 2, Sections 2 and 4); punishments which were seen to be particularly masculine in nature. A similar end awaits the young girl in the third story who, having denied men her beauty, later, when forced to marry a repulsive old man, destroys her own body in despair:

Elle commenca cruellement à s'esgrafiner le visaige (p.162).

Another punishment imposed on a female character who withholds her love is for her to become the victim of eternal pursuit in a never-ending hunt (see *compte* 5). Every so often, the girl is caught and violently torn apart by her pursuers:

Deux gros mastins noirs et hydeux qui suyvant la damoiselle,  
la mordoient de tous costez (p.186).

No respite is granted to the defenceless damsel, for as soon as she has been caught, the hunt begins again. This repeated sequence, depicting a scene of torture followed by another describing the girl's resuscitation, marks a very close parallel with the pattern of events in the lives of the saints, whose quasi-indestructibility ensures continued persecution. Punishment for dissension from the religion of love is not limited to the characters in the tales themselves. Within the actual framework of the text we also witness Venus' revenge upon the dissenting narrator, Madame Cebille, whose fate is not dissimilar to that of the characters in the stories:

Car d'elle, sa conclusion estoit telle que ce n'estoit que toute folie. Las! La pauvrete! Ainsi estoit elle endurcye par le vouloir des Dieux offensez, à ce que après en fut la punition plus honteuse et cruelle, lorsqu'elle abandonneroit son honnesteté tant deffenduë à ung vilain et sale palefrenier, avec lequel lyée toute nue fut par son mary justement indignée, exposée emmy la rue au spectacle de tout le peuple (p.215).

The ambiguities underlying the *Comptes* have been taken as proof of the work's male authorship. However, while contradictions certainly exist between the desire to liberate women from a patriarchal morality and the actual presentation of female characters who are unquestionably submissive (or punished if they are not), a solution may be found from a brief examination of Flore's sources.<sup>36</sup> Not one of the seven tales in the *Comptes* is a totally original creation. On the contrary, the *Comptes* represents a patchwork of literary borrowings, all of which may be traced back to *male* writers: Boccaccio, Lemaire, Boiardo and Bello, to name but a few. Flore is therefore working with a masculine tradition, which, when combined with her own feminine voice, does not always produce a coherent result:

Nous croyons donc que l'ambiguïté textuelle est le produit d'un effort didactique féminin (inhabituel pour l'époque) qui, pour prendre forme, doit se couler dans les moules idéologiques et esthétiques traditionnels, tout en exprimant un point de vue 'expérientiellement' différent de celui des hommes.<sup>37</sup>

In the absence of an established feminine, literary tradition, Jeanne Flore is thus faced with the difficulty of transforming tales written by male writers into tales for the female reader; a procedure which, while not always entirely successful, results in a work which is both courageous and highly original.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DEVOTIONAL WRITINGS

#### 1. Marguerite de Navarre

##### Choosing a Genre

In the first part of my thesis I discussed attitudes towards the woman reader. This examination revealed that, for women, reading was essentially a pastime, which was also intended to provide moral edification. In contrast, for men, reading was seen to have a practical value, serving as preparation for a particular profession or as a source of inspiration for their own writing. The titles found in reading lists for the woman reader were seen to belong to one single category; all being devotional works of a Christian nature. Needless to say, the reading experience of an obedient woman reader would have been somewhat limited and one-sided. Bearing in mind the close relation between the act of reading and that of writing (the latter being intrinsically dependent upon the former), it is scarcely surprising to find that when sixteenth-century women did venture into production, the majority of their works were, in some way, devotional. In the course of the following chapter, I will be focusing on a number of non-secular texts composed by women in the first half of the sixteenth century. I hope to show that, while working within the same field, each of these writers retains a certain individuality in her style of writing which ensures that no two texts will be in any way identical.

A disappointment awaits the sixteenth-century reader who turns her attention to courtesy literature in the hope of gleaning specific advice for her literary endeavours. Treatise writers remain suspiciously silent on the subject of feminine writing, thereby revealing the extent to which such discussion was taboo. If we remember that the very concept of the woman writer was, no doubt, something of a contradiction in terms, then we may begin to understand why guidelines for appropriate subjects or writing styles would be superfluous details in an etiquette book. On one of the rare occasions when reference is made to the role of the female author, the advice given has a remarkably familiar ring about it:

S'elle escrit pour recreation et eviter oysiveté, ce ne soyent vers impudics, viles chansons: mais de la sainte escripture exemples ou sentences de philosophes, ou bien histoires louables pour se rendre meilleur et servir à elle et à la doctrine de ses enfans ou compaignes (Vives, *Institution de la femme*, p.23).

In the space of a couple of brief precepts, Vives succeeds in carefully specifying the subject matter, the reading public and the motives which are to dictate the composition of the feminine text. It immediately becomes obvious that the woman writer is being encouraged to produce works of a similar ilk to those she would have been reading; that is to say, both devotional and morally useful. Vives appears to have chosen the words of his advice with considerable caution. Indeed, his use of the terms 'exemples' and 'sentences' (*exempla* and *sententia* in Latin) seems to suggest that women's writing should consist of nothing more than the copying out of biblical passages or moral maxims. It is almost as an afterthought ('ou bien') that Vives rather reluctantly accords women the freedom to produce their own original writing. Even then, the advice seems ambiguous; the liberty to write being camouflaged by the possibility of interpreting the 'histoires louables' as texts which are also to be copied rather than composed. The readership of works by women is defined by Vives as being limited to their own children and to their, no doubt female, companions. A woman's book is, therefore, envisaged as something which will remain within the confines of the household and not become a commercial object to be distributed in the public world. Furthermore, Vives outlines the motives which should lie behind a woman's desire to write. As with the act of reading, writing provides an ideal solution for avoiding idleness and, consequently, reduces the risk of losing one's chastity. Moreover, writing may also serve as a means for the moral improvement ('se rendre meilleur') of the author, as well as of her entourage in general. Vives' words seem to point to a conscious attempt to smother what must have been one of the only potential sources of freedom available to the sixteenth-century woman. Although the literary act usually tends to imply a certain liberty of expression, Vives' definition of writing denies this freedom by imposing a set of restrictive precepts for the woman writer. It is interesting to note that while grudgingly according woman a voice of her own, Vives ensures that such a privilege will not interfere in any way with the traditional feminine roles of chaste wife, instructive mother or manager of household staff. Thus, this carefully worded definition of the feminine literary act transforms an activity which, at the outset, may have seemed to pose a threat to the female behavioural model, into a tool for maintaining this role firmly in place.

Of all the women writers of the sixteenth century, Marguerite de Navarre stands out as being one of the most important contributors to the field of devotional writing. Marguerite is, in fact, the only well-known female devotional writer of the period between 1500 and 1540. She is also, perhaps, within a religious context, one of the most active women in France, being patron to evangelical writers such as Clément Marot. Unlike many of the other

women writers to be studied in this chapter, Marguerite represents a relatively public voice, in the sense that a good number of her works, including the ones which I will be examining, were actually published in her lifetime. Thus, as one of the most important female figures in France during the early sixteenth century, Marguerite holds a privileged social position which makes her voice an important one to which it is well worth listening. It is for this reason that I have decided to ignore chronological order by discussing Marguerite's writing first of all, before moving on to lesser known female writers. In this section, I have chosen to concentrate on two of Marguerite's works which can be safely dated to the years falling within the limits of this study, that is, the long narrative poem *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* (first published in 1531) and the *Dialogue en forme de vision nocturne* (printed in 1533).<sup>1</sup>

### Writing to Resolve

In Christine de Pizan's *L'Avison-Christine*, Dame Couronne expresses the joy which results from confiding in a trust-worthy listener:

O quel plaisir et quel alegement est de dire et descouvrir a son  
loial ami ou amie les pesanteurs de ses pensees (*L'Avison-Christine*, p.107).

As has already been seen, Marguerite de Navarre's *La Coche* also illustrates the notion of speech as cathartic; the narrator gently coaxing the three grief-stricken ladies into breaking their silence:

Ung mal caché va tousjours empirant,  
Et, s'il est tel qu'il ne puisse estre pire,  
Il s'amoindrist quelque foys à le dire (ll.90-92).

Indeed, the theme of speech as a medium by which one may seek to resolve a personal problem may be traced through the greater part of Marguerite de Navarre's writing and is especially significant in her devotional works. As might be expected, in texts of this kind, the problem posed at the beginning is a specifically spiritual one. Marguerite places little emphasis on setting the scene for these works. Dismissing literary niceties, she frequently begins her narrative at the point when the narrator/protagonist has already reached the crux of her crisis. This technique, violating readerly expectations, may bewilder or even disorientate a reader accustomed to a more gentle entry into a fictional situation. The crisis or dilemma we are thrust into from the first lines of Marguerite's works is, in many cases, characterized by the use of the interrogative form. An illustration of such instability may be found in the *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*, where the first two phrases are questions, each repeating the word 'où' and thereby establishing the speaker's disorientation:



OV est l'enfer remply entierement  
 De tout malheur, trauail, peine, et tourment?  
 Ou est le puitz de malediction,  
 D'ou sans fin sort desesperation? (ll.1-4).

The narrator's acute despair is underlined by her intensely negative reasoning which causes her to attempt to locate the position of hell, rather than strive to seek heaven. From the very beginning of *Le Miroir* we find ourselves in a world of ambiguity where no certainty is possible. The 'regard' has no place in a narrative of this kind, where we are immediately confronted with a burst of speech. Confusion is further heightened by our ignorance of the identity of both the speaker and the listener, as well as by the fact that the opening questions are rhetorical. By the end of *Le Miroir*, the initial questions are resolved, as a more positive outlook replaces all doubt: 'Enfer est donc par luy du tout destruit' (l.1253). An indication that certainty is restored is our ability, now, to identify 'luy' as Christ himself. By focusing our attention on speech, or rather the lack of it, the first passages of the *Miroir* reveal the extent to which the Soul has become alienated from Christ. Her sinful state is depicted by means of the striking image of vegetation sprouting from within her body and deadening her senses. Struck dumb by this plant-like growth, the narrator discovers that, at this stage, no dialogue with Christ is possible:

En ma bouche tombe, quand veulx parler,  
 Le fruit par trop amer à avaler (ll.19-20).

By the end of the *Miroir*, the re-establishment of a privileged rapport with Christ is accompanied by the Soul's new ability to converse freely with her creator:

Puis que propos à vous ie puis tenir  
 Aultre que vous ne veulx entretenir (ll.989-990).

The *Dialogue en forme de vision nocturne* also begins with a crisis characterized by an attack of aphasia:

... je croy, que onques femme  
 Telle douleur ne pourroit soustenir,  
 Sans le depart par mort de corps et d'âme.

Mais en mon dueil et piteux souvenir,  
 Ayant esté sans parler longue pièce (ll.46-50).

It is only by means of the conversations with her niece that the narrator is finally able to achieve a peaceful state of mind. This transition between silence/dilemma and speech/solution (achieved through a process of frank self-analysis) seems to be a feature of many of Marguerite's narratives, indicating her awareness of literature as a useful tool for the

resolution of personal conflict. The three liminary *rondeaux* heading the *Dialogue* have the principal purpose of summarizing the progress of the narrative which we are about to read; but also seem, in a more general capacity, to epitomize the tri-partite structure characteristic of so much of Marguerite's writing. The first of these *rondeaux* stands as a cry for help, the despairing speaker seeking, above all, the assistance of an interlocutor to answer her questions. This *rondeau* opens with the words 'Repondez moy' which are repeated twice more in each of the *renvois*. The second of the *rondeaux*, built around the phrase 'Contentez vous', constitutes the response of Charlotte to her aunt's plea. Finally, the last *rondeau* represents the resolution of the dilemma; the initial anxiety and questioning being replaced by a calmer certitude: 'Contente suis'. As this tri-partite structure implies, Marguerite's texts are far from being static. However, to speak of the existence of an actual 'plot' would be inappropriate for works which are entirely devoid of action in the conventional sense of the term. Marguerite's narratives are almost all situated within the mind and develop by means of a succession of thoughts rather than through any external events. It is, in fact, this preference of the author for the technique of internal monologue which has laid her open to the conventional male criticism that her writing is formless, gossipy or verbose: 'C'est moins un poème qu'une longue effusion... un bavardage parfois pénible à suivre'.<sup>2</sup> An alternative to this negative view of Marguerite's introspective writing may be found in Béatrice Didier's description of the feminine text as 'une écriture du Dedans: l'intérieur du corps' (quoted from Intro.2).

A text such as the *Miroir* may, in one sense, be considered to portray a rather random episode, having no fixed beginning or end. In fact, it is no more than a glimpse into the working of a mind which, perforce, will continue, outside the limits of the text, to create and resolve dilemmas of the kind we have observed. A style of composition such as this holds much in common with the passages of internal monologue found in Hélienne de Crenne's *Angoysses douloureuses*. However, Marguerite's use of internal monologue is considerably more sustained than in the *Angoysses*, where such introspective scenes are replaced by a more masculine text in which the heroine steps down to allow a male protagonist to take the leading role. In *Le Miroir*, the entire narrative traces the constantly fluctuating moods of the narrator. Before embarking on the text itself, the reader is already alerted to the nature of the writing which is to follow when, in the address 'Au Lecteur', Marguerite announces the sole purpose of her work to be:

... que chascun puisse veoir,  
Que faict le don de DIEV le Createur,  
Quand il luy plaist iustifier vng cueur  
(Au Lecteur, ll.6-8).

## The Disembodied Voice

The focus of Marguerite's writing being inward-looking, her characters tend to have no physical presence. They are, quite literally, disembodied figures left with only their voice by which to define themselves:

Marguerite's poetry tends always toward a deconstruction of the visual, the concrete, the fleshy. Her landscapes are not of the outer but of the inner world. The ultimate decor in all her poetry is that of the human heart.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the characters of Marguerite's universe are wholly authentic 'pour-soi' representations, capable of manipulating complex ideas and thought-patterns. Their bodiless presentation provides a sharp contrast with the voiceless female limbs glimpsed in many of the masculine texts examined so far. Moreover, unlike Héli-senne's mirror, which reflects the essence-less physical image much coveted by a voyeuristic male public, Marguerite's 'Miroir' seeks neither to reify nor to exploit the aesthetic qualities of her female protagonist. On the contrary, Marguerite's text mirrors only the mind of the female speaker. The author's rejection of all that is bodily may explain the importance of speech in her works, many of which tend to be structured in the form of monologues, dialogues or conversations (the *Heptaméron* being the most complex of these). As a result of her interest in speech, a significant part of Marguerite's literary output consists of actual plays. Moreover, the division between her poetic and dramatic writings is not always clear-cut; many of her poems having a distinctly theatrical feel to them. One example of this is the *Dialogue* which signals changes in speaker by heading each 'speech' with the name of the character (i.e. Madame la Duchesse or Charlotte).

The characters chosen to receive the narrator's confidences and to aid her process of rehabilitation are not necessarily typical figures of authority, such as a priest or learned doctor. On the contrary, Marguerite seems to revel in subverting roles traditionally dictated by an inflexible power hierarchy. In this way, characters who might normally be expected to adopt a low profile in speech communion prove to be the dominant and eloquent speakers. In the *Dialogue*, it is the soul of Marguerite de Navarre's deceased eight year old niece who is chosen to comfort the melancholy narrator.<sup>4</sup> One strikingly touching scene conveys Charlotte's new role when, with her child's hand, she offers her aunt a handkerchief as a gesture of love:

Lors s'approcha, et d'ung riant visaige  
Print ung moucheur, et des petites mains  
Les grosses larmes m'essuyoit du visaige  
(ll.55-57).

It is also Charlotte's role to answer her aunt's questions by enumerating complex points of Christian doctrine. The conversation which ensues between Marguerite and her niece proceeds with a natural rhythm which lends the *Dialogue* every appearance of spontaneity. Marguerite's own speeches are marked by their brevity, punctuated by questions and hesitations. In contrast, Charlotte's extended speeches are confident and authoritative; her use of language being of the most sophisticated nature. The two speakers quickly settle into a teacher/pupil situation where phrases such as 'Apprenez moy' (l.728), 'Encore ung mot d'entendre j'ay envie' (l.205), 'Vostre raison mon ignorance assomme' (l.385) stress the narrator's unusual pupillage. Marguerite's progress as student is slow and somewhat arduous. However, throughout the *Dialogue* Charlotte patiently guides her aunt, gently chiding her when she has failed to grasp some doctrinal argument:

Tante, tante, de cela vous fault taire (l.115).

C'est trop erré, ma Tante (l.127).

Ne congnoissez vous que avez mal dit? (l. 487).

Desja vous voy, tante, trop esgaree (l.538).

The reversal of roles is particularly underscored by Charlotte's persistent use of the appellation 'tante' in phrases which establish her position of superiority. The first signs of the narrator's comprehension of Charlotte's instruction do not occur until over half way through the *Dialogue*: 'Vous me plaisez, Tante, à ceste heure, fort' (l.673). Indeed, shortly after this, we witness the beginning of the resolution of the narrator's initial crisis:

Tant je trouve vostre parolle douce,  
Pleine de Foy, de dieu, et verité,  
Car la croire bon mon cueur poulse  
(ll.892-94).

Marguerite de Navarre's self-depiction as the inferior speaker seems to be part of the modesty topos which extends over all her works. I have already indicated the importance of this modesty topos in *La Coche* and, later in this section, I will be discussing Marguerite's extensive use of it in *Le Miroir*. Additionally, in Section 2 of this chapter, we will see that Gabrielle de Bourbon favours the teacher/pupil structure of writing in which she concedes her privilege of omnipotent author in order to step into a role of secondary importance.

#### 'Ie Confesse'

The entire text of *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* forms an extended confession. Indeed, it is solely by means of the confession, one of the most intimate kinds of speech

possible, that the dilemma posed at the outset of *Le Miroir* may be resolved. The word 'confesse' recurs repeatedly (e.g. 1.381, 1.478, 1.607 etc.), pointing to the humble stance adopted by the narrator as she addresses her confessor. This confessor is Christ. This, in itself, is significant, underlining the evangelical leaning of Marguerite's writing. Indeed, we would be unlikely to find direct confession of this kind in a work by a more traditional Catholic woman writer. As will be seen in Section 3, even Catherine d'Amboise requires the figure of a guardian angel who may serve as intermediary between herself and Christ. The identification of Christ as confessor, in *Le Miroir*, places the reader in a somewhat ambivalent position. On the one hand, the reader, as receiver of the narrator's confidences, is placed on a par with Christ and may feel encouraged to adopt an attitude of superiority over the self-deprecating narrator. However, on the other hand, the more obvious reaction of the reader is, no doubt, to experience the uncomfortable feeling of becoming an unwilling voyeur, an intruder or an eavesdropper on a private discourse of the most intimate nature. In spite of Marguerite's clear invitation for her text to be read ('Mais vous Lecteur de bonne conscience,/ Je vous requier, prenez la patience/ Lire du tout ceste oeuvre,' *Au Lecteur*, ll.27-29), her readers are soon forgotten as her confession develops. At first the narrator is unable to identify her Redeemer:

Qui est celluy, lequel i'ay offensé,  
 Auquel si peu de seruir i'ay pensé  
 (ll.41-42).

Although the speaker soon recognizes Christ as her Saviour, she is, as yet, unable to establish an intimate dialogue with him. The distance between the Soul and Christ, at this stage in the narrative, is reflected by the rather impersonal use of the third-person:

Qui sera ce, qui me deliuerera:  
 Et qui tel bien pour moy recouurerà?  
 Las ce ne poeut estre ung homme mortel,  
 Car leur pouoir, et sçauoir n'est pas tel:  
 Mais ce sera la seule bonne grace  
 Du tout puissant, qui iamais ne se lasse,  
 Par IESVS CHRIST, duquel il se recorde,  
 Nous prevenir par sa misericorde (ll.65-72).

As soon as discourse with Christ is recovered, the presence of the reader in the text no longer seems to be required by the narrator, who effectively excludes the reader by switching her use of the 'vous' form to refer, now, to Christ alone:

Helas mon DIEV, ie ne vous cherchoys pas,  
 Mais vous fuyoyz en courant le grand pas:  
 Et vous ça bas à moy estes venu  
 (ll.97-99).

In spite of the fact that the text of *Le Miroir* is intended as a mirror, on account of the ever-changing female roles adopted by the narrator (see below), it becomes increasingly difficult for us, as readers, to recognize our own reflections. Instead, our attention is focused on the image reflected by the speaker herself, making it easy for us to become critical onlookers. Thus, the reader's role is not so much as a participator in the narrative, but as an observer of the Soul's crisis and subsequent recovery; a role which Marguerite herself hints at in the first lines of her poem:

... que chascun puisse veoir,  
Que faict le don de DIEV le Createur  
(Au Lecteur, ll.6-7).

At first sight, *Le Miroir* has every appearance of being a particularly personal, even autobiographical piece of writing. The first person 'Ie' dominates throughout the poem as the narrator relates her confession. However, a closer examination reveals a distinct ambiguity surrounding the use of 'je'. To start with (unlike both *La Coche* and the *Dialogue*), *Le Miroir* makes no attempt to identify the narrator with a specific person. We may assume the voice of the speaker to be that of Marguerite herself, for references in *Le Miroir* indicate that the speaker is also the author of the text. But, this assumption must remain unfounded, for we are told nothing at all about the narrator other than the state of her mind. The narrative 'je' is therefore the anonymous voice of an inner-self. As the only speaker in the text, the narrator's voice is naturally a dominant one. However, while being all-pervasive, the narrative voice is far from being confident or authoritative. We are, of course, in the presence of a speaker who is profoundly aware of her sinful state. Consequently, the narrator presents herself with extreme humility, openly confessing her sins and acknowledging her guilt:

En moy ie sens la force de peché,  
Dont moindre n'est mon mal d'estre caché:  
Et plus dehors se cele et dissimule,  
Plus dens le cueur s'assemble et accumule  
(ll.55-58).

The 'je' of *Le Miroir* is a hesitant voice, full of questions, doubts and uncertainties; a voice which lacks all self-confidence. In a wish to express her penitence, the narrator adopts an attitude towards herself which is undermining, if not self-deprecating:

Par quoy il fault, que mon orgueil r'abaisse,  
Et qu'humblement en plorant ie confesse,  
Que, quant à moy, ie suis trop moins que riens  
(ll.43-45).

The speaker, in her self-analysis, proves to be an exceptionally harsh critic of her own misdemeanours. Derogatory epithets or phrases such as 'riens ie ne vaulx' (l.382), 'Moy,

moins que riens, toute nichilité' (l.494), or 'Moy villaine, ce que fault que n'oublie' (l.615) are typical examples of the protagonist's incriminatory attitude towards herself. This destructive vision of the self is emphasized by the narrator's persistent use of synonyms to describe her burden of sin (chains of synonyms have already been seen to be a popular technique of women writers including Hélienne de Crenne and Jeanne Flore). Furthermore, the belittlement of the 'je' in *Le Miroir* becomes even more pronounced through a series of unfavourable comparisons with her addressee. A binary structure ensues, whereby Christ's goodness is placed in direct opposition to the Soul's sinfulness, making sure that the speaker's inferiority will be particularly highlighted:

Le bien de vous, qui est tant admirable:  
 Le mal de moy, trop inconsiderable.  
 Vostre haulteur, vostre essence trespure:  
 Ma tresfragile, et mortelle nature.  
 Voz dons, voz biens, vostre beatitude:  
 Ma malice, et grande ingratitude  
 (ll.865-870).

#### The Blank Page

The constant reduction of the 'je' of *Le Miroir* to a state of almost total self-effacement would seem to be part of a highly developed overall modesty topos. On a more traditional level, we find the commonplace apologies of the female writer excusing her feeble literary talents:

SI VOVS lisez ceste oeuvre toute entiere,  
 Arrestez vous, sans plus, à la matiere:  
 En excusant la Ryme, et le langaige,  
 Voyant que c'est d'une femme l'ouuraige  
 (Au Lecteur, ll.1-4).

However, Marguerite tends to take this topos much further than the average writer, who does no more than pay lip-service to a necessary rhetorical device. The author, in her determination to excuse her text, reduces *Le Miroir* to a state of virtual non-existence comparable with the similar effacement of the narrator herself:

Je vous requier, prenez la patience  
 Lire du tout ceste oeuvre, *qui n'est rien*  
 (Au Lecteur, ll.28-29).

Towards the end of the narrative, the speaker, remembering her role as author, questions her capacity to compose a text which must attempt to describe God's love:

le puis'ie bien escripre? (l.1316).

la poeut'il exprimer? (l.1320).

At one stage the author contemplates total renunciation of her literary project which, by its nature, can only fall short of success: 'L'impossible me fera doncques taire' (l.1367). However, such a view conflicts with the author's personal desire to speak out. Indeed, the decision to start writing the text of *Le Miroir* rests on the author's awareness of the unacceptable ingratitude her silence would represent:

Moy doncques ver de terre, moins que riens,  
 Chienne morte, pourriture de fiens,  
 Cesser doy bien, parler de l'altitude  
 De ceste amour: mais trop d'ingratitude  
 Seroit en moy, si n'eusse riens escript,  
 Satisfaisant à trop meilleur Esprit.  
 Quar de celer les biens d'ung si bon maistre,  
 C'est ung crime.... (ll.1373-1380).

The text which Marguerite puts together is not, strictly speaking, her own. A cursory survey of *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* immediately reveals that the narrator's own voice is, in fact, largely overshadowed by a plethora of biblical quotations and paraphrases. Marguerite's text is, quite literally, effaced in order to become a 'clear, polished mirror that reflects God's text'.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, having declared her own work to be worthless ('qui n'est rien'), the author now replaces it with a text which is both masculine and unquestionably authoritative. This obvious attempt to deflect the reader's attention from her own writing serves yet again to undermine the narrator's authority and may, consequently, be regarded as another facet of an increasingly complex modesty topos.

The theme of self-effacement which pervades the whole of *Le Miroir* may be traced back to the influence of Marguerite's spiritual mentor and much valued correspondent, Guillaume Briçonnet. Indeed, Briçonnet's letter, dated 12th June 1521, contains ideas which are echoed in the author's own writing:

Bien eureulx est qui est feru de telle congnoissance, de laquelle  
 croy certainement que vostre cueur est attainct au vif, et, hors  
 de soy, vivant en luy, abismé et aneanty.

Coeur aneanty et bien mortifié a grand povoir pour le geant  
 combattre.

En luy est tout et en vous rien.<sup>6</sup>

Such ideas also lie behind Charlotte's speech, in the *Dialogue*, which informs Marguerite of the necessity of becoming an object of God, of being the created and not the creator. To clarify her argument, Charlotte urges her aunt to consider the example of a tree which must



be stripped of branches and planed down before use by a craftsman. This must also be the case with Marguerite who, in order to find a place with the divine craftsman, must first prepare herself by 'planing' her own character of its individuality:

De vous mesmes pouvoir monter en hault  
 Vous ne sçauriez, non plus que pierre ou bois,  
 Qui sans estre préparé riens ne vault  
 (ll.256-58).

Briçonnet's conception of speech as an inadequate medium by which to express divine love may help to explain Marguerite's own writing of *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*:

The text is a tool, an instrument that is used to fashion something else and then discarded. Composed of words, each of which contains a trace of *Tout-Verbe*, the text is a sign that points not to itself or its own artifices but to reality, i.e., Christ. It aspires to its own annihilation.... It tries to draw the reader away from the literal meaning, which Briçonnet calls *Rien* [nothing] and to lead him to the spiritual meaning, which he calls *Tout* [All]. Only if it overcomes its textuality and becomes a kind of blank page or mirror can the text reflect a reality that is other than itself.<sup>7</sup>

Remembering Briçonnet's teaching, in the very first lines of *Le Miroir*, Marguerite indicates to the reader the manner in which her text is to be read, stressing the fact that style or literary niceties are of secondary importance to the subject matter itself:

Arrestez vous, sans plus, à la matiere:  
 En excusant la Rhyme, et le langaige  
 (Au Lecteur, ll.2-3).

This perception of the literary act strikes a marked contrast with many masculine works (such as those found in the *Querelle*), where the reader's attention is focused above all on the verbal surface of the text. As a consequence, one of the most immediately notable characteristics of *Le Miroir* is that flamboyant rhetorical techniques tend to be played down and the style restrained. A theme to which Briçonnet frequently returns is the rejection of reason which may only hinder union with Christ. Accordingly, Briçonnet recommends the use of nonsense and gibberish as a means of reaching out to God. Traces of this line of thinking are, at times, perceptible in Marguerite's own works (see, for example, the play *L'Inquisiteur*). In the *Dialogue en forme de vision nocturne*, we find Charlotte carefully instructing her aunt to cease her almost obsessive concern with reason:

Lhors est raison sur le sens souveraine;  
 Mais toutesfois il ne s'y fault fier,  
 Car contre Foy deviendroit trop haultaine

Par l'esperit la fault mortifier.  
 Regnant la Foy, raison sera destruite  
 Pour commencer l'âme à édifier (ll.265-270).

Certain passages in *Le Miroir* play out this idea by ceasing logical argument in order to rejoice in the sound of the words themselves: 'Mon filz, mon DIEV, O IESVS quel langage' (l.349). An illustration of this technique occurs towards the end of the text, as the Soul marvels over the various possible relationships between God and herself (see below). Words are juggled with and piled up to such an extent that meaning almost vanishes from the text:

Filz, Pere, Espoux, et Frere entierement  
 Pere, Frere, Filz, Mary: O quelz dons  
 De me donner le bien de tous ces noms.  
 O mon Pere, quelle paternité,  
 O mon Frere, quelle fraternité,  
 O mon Enfant, quelle dilection,  
 O mon Espoux, quelle conionction  
 (ll.932-938).

#### A Reader in the Text

*Le Miroir*, while standing first and foremost as an intimate confession, may also be described as being a book about the act of reading. The theme of reading may be examined on two levels, focusing either on the reader in general, or the narrator herself as reader. As has already been seen, the text itself is structured by a framework of biblical quotations and paraphrases. Many of these are accompanied by marginal references indicating the exact source of the passages. Occasionally, the notation found in the margin will not direct the reader to the passage cited, but to another section of the Bible. In this way, Marguerite's reader may adopt a more active role. The reader who chooses to follow up Marguerite's marginal references immediately transforms the act of reading into a more complex and diverse process, by which interpretations of the text may be greatly multiplied. However, we must also remember that Marguerite's inclusion of references to Scriptural passages is yet another device for deflecting attention from the text itself. With its patchwork structure of Scriptural citation, *Le Miroir* provides the reader with a carefully constructed programme of biblical reading. Considering that a large section of Marguerite's reading public was, no doubt, female, it seems possible to view *Le Miroir* as a kind of reading aid, designed to guide and encourage the inexperienced woman in her Bible reading.

Within *Le Miroir* itself, the narrator's initial despair is presented in terms of a reading crisis. The narrator confesses her inability or unwillingness to comprehend God's word. At this stage, the Soul's reading of the Bible is quite clearly depicted as an incorrect one:

Las tous ces motz ne voulois escouter,  
 Mais encores, ie venois à doubter,  
 Si c'estoit vous: ou si par aduenture

Ce n'estoit riens, qu'une simple escripture.  
 Car iusques la, i'estoie bien si folle,  
 Que sans amour lisois vostre parolle  
 (ll.725-30).

It is in this state of ignorance that the Soul is first introduced to us. In order to resolve the initial dilemma and diminish her burden of sin, she must first learn to adopt a correct reading of the Bible. Such a change occurs as the narrator reads a passage from Jeremiah which serves to inform her of her previous errors:

De tout cela semblant ne faisois mie:  
 Mais, quand ie vins à lire Hieremie,  
 Je confesse, que i'euz en ce passage  
 Crainte en mon cuer, et honte en mon visaige  
 (ll.741-44).

Once the narrator has learnt to reread Scripture, she may now begin a re-examination of the Self and eventually reconstruct a new identity. Through her new, enlightened reading, the Soul has discovered that she may renew her relationship with Christ by assuming a number of roles. During the course of *Le Miroir*, the narrator gradually explores new images of the 'je' which becomes, in turn, daughter, mother, sister and wife of Christ. Fearing her own forwardness and audacity in allowing herself such a privileged status, the narrator, lacking in confidence, continually refers back to Scripture in order to reassure herself that she has not misinterpreted her biblical sources:

Mais la raison à ma doute bien mistes,  
 Quand en preschant, estendant voz bras, distes,  
 'Ceulx qui feront le vouloir de mon Pere,  
 Mes freres sont, et ma soeur, et ma mere.  
 Je croy doncques, qu'en oyant, ou lisant  
 La parolle, que vous estes disant...  
 Que par amour ie vous ay engendré (ll.265-75).

Marguerite structures the new mirror images of the Soul into four distinct tableaux, where the Soul is able to envisage her Self in a series of different situations.<sup>8</sup> Each narrative is constructed on the same pattern, whereby the narrator confesses her sins, is pardoned, and rejoices in Christ's forgiveness. However, in spite of the repetition of this structure, a perceptible development occurs throughout the course of the four tableaux. Each passage is presented as a decline further into sin ('Mais voicy pis', l.415), accompanied by a corresponding increase in Christ's forgiveness. We therefore witness an ever-widening dichotomy separating the 'je' and the 'vous', ensuring that the narrator will experience an increasingly strong sense of the inadequacy of each new Self. In order to represent her sin, the narrator appropriates various parables and biblical stories, substituting her own Self for the original sinner. In the first of the tableaux, by recourse to her reading of the parable of the

prodigal son, the narrator is able to explore the relationship between father and daughter, while assuming the role of the 'enfant prodigue'. The second scene recounts the story found in 1 Kings 3 where Solomon is called upon to judge an argument between two women claiming the same child to be their own. The narrator enters the role of the true mother, attributing the theft of her baby (in this case, Christ) to her promiscuous behaviour. The following tableau shows the narrator taking on yet another identity, now as the sister of Christ. Here, the narrator's vision is inspired by the story of Miriam, sister of Moses, who has been punished with leprosy for criticizing her brother (see Numbers 12). The fourth and final scene, which presents the image of the Soul as the unfaithful wife, is the longest and apparently most heartfelt of all the confessions.<sup>9</sup> Using the device of anaphora, the narrator seeks to emphasize her guilt as an adulterous wife:

Moy, qui estois nommée espouse et femme,  
De vous aymée comme vostre propre ame,  
En diray' ie la verité? ouy.  
Laissé vous ay, oublyé, et fuÿ:  
Laissé vous ay, pour suyure mon plaisir:  
Laissé vous ay, pour vng mauuais choisir,  
Laissé vous ay source de tout mon bien,  
Laissé vous ay: en rompant le lien  
De vraye amour, et loyaulté promise:  
Laissé vous ay.... (ll.639-48).

Far from being spurned, the wayward wife is welcomed back by Christ with a touchingly human gesture of love:

Mais à deux bras d'ung cuer doux, et humain  
M'estes venu, m'embrassant, approcher  
(ll.814-15).

In order to gauge Christ's perfection as a husband, the narrator compares Him with a non-spiritual spouse; the catalogue of penalties which the earthly husband inflicts on his wife serving to underline the exceptional nature of the divine marriage:

Ie n'ay point veu, ou il est bien caché,  
Que nul mary, pour à luy retourner,  
A sa femme ayt voulu pardonner.  
Assez en est, qui pour venger leur tort,  
Par les iuges les ont faict mettre à mort.  
Aultres, voyantz leur peché, tout subdain  
A les tuer n'ont espargné leur main.  
Aultres, voyantz leurs mauix trop apparentz,  
R'envoyées les ont chez leurs parentz.  
Aultres, cuydantz punir leur mauuais tour,  
Enfermées les ont dens une tour.  
Brief, regardez toutes complexions,  
La fin n'en tend qu'à grandz punitions.

Et le moins mal, que i'en ay peu sçauoir,  
C'est, que iamais ilz ne les veulent veoir  
(ll.584-98).

Such punishments are, of course, the subject of many of the stories of Marguerite's *Heptaméron* (see Chapter 3, Section 3). This dual vision of marriage, in which the gulf separating the spiritual and the terrestrial union is made to appear so great that the two have little left in common, seems to be a backhanded criticism of the sixteenth-century marriage. Similar scepticism may be observed elsewhere in Marguerite's writing and notably in the *Dialogue*, where a portrait of the role of a female queen as a political pawn is surely directly related to the author's own experience as wife:

Maryée j'eusse poeu estre en grand lieu  
Pour donner paix aux aultres, dont la guerre  
J'eusse eu pour part du butin de ce jeu.

J'eusse tenu grandz pays subiectz et terre,  
Et espousé ung Roy ou Empereur,  
Et gouverné ung monde où chascun erre  
(*Dialogue*, ll. 145-50).

Marguerite's tableaux would then appear to accord a new importance to the relationships between father and daughter, son and mother, brother and sister, and husband and wife; relationships which, in Marguerite's eyes, are sorely abused in her own society. Indeed, the study of these roles in courtesy literature revealed little for women to rejoice in, all emphasis being placed by the male writer on curbing and restraining female behaviour. In *Le Miroir*, Marguerite seeks to reverse these well-established models by revitalizing the traditional male/female relationships. Such an endeavour, while certainly worthy of praise, falls sadly short of its goal. By viewing the four tableaux in a rather different light, we soon see that each scene serves principally to renew the female Soul's consciousness of sin, plunging her deeper and deeper into a state of despair. Already plagued by a sense of failure at the beginning of the narrative, the narrator's feeling of inadequacy is continually reinforced with every new identity adopted. Thus, we see that Marguerite's programme of biblical reading *does* offer new ways in which the woman reader may explore her Self, her relationship with Christ, and with men in general. However, Marguerite's interpretation of the Bible seems to be profoundly conditioned by the current ideals and stereotypes of feminine roles. Gleaning her examples from what may be termed as an essentially masculine text, the author repeatedly depicts situations which justify dominant patriarchal male roles, while encouraging feminine submission. In this way, we see how traditional gender roles, permeating all fields of thought, may colour even religious experience for the female writer. Taught to envisage herself solely in relation to the male sex, a woman writer will inevitably

find herself trapped into taking up a masculine perspective, in spite of her awareness of its failings.

*Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* thus presents us with a series of ambiguities which may be accounted for if we remember the difficulties experienced by a woman writer striving to find a voice of her own in the sixteenth century. On the one hand, Marguerite successfully escapes the offensive 'en-soi' representations of women which pervade the writing of male writers studied in the first part of my thesis. However, Marguerite's depiction, in *Le Miroir*, of a developed 'pour-soi' figure, characterized by her voice alone, is seriously undermined by her constant desire to erase this voice and substitute, in its place, an apparently superior masculine one. Indeed, in spite of *Le Miroir's* appearance of being a personal or autobiographical text, we come to realize, by the end of the poem, that any attempt to pinpoint the narrative 'je' is destined to fall short of success. The 'je' of Marguerite's text proves to be ever-shifting and elusive, constantly masked by changing identities. This is, no doubt, a deliberate ploy on behalf of an author seeking, as both a woman and a Christian, to efface herself as much as possible from the pages of her own text. To conclude, it is perhaps interesting to look back to the words of Vives quoted at the beginning of my chapter. Having examined *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* in detail, we may now see that Marguerite's poem does, in fact, correspond very closely with Vives' definition of the ideal feminine text. Indeed, Marguerite's manner of quite literally copying out biblical excerpts to produce a work which reinforces the traditional female roles is the perfect example of the kind of text that Vives would most certainly have hoped to be written by women.

## 2. Gabrielle de Bourbon (d.1516)

In her description of the field of gynocritics, Elaine Showalter speaks of the need to reconstruct women's literary history by rediscovering women writers whose works have been obscured by time. Showalter underlines the importance of establishing the continuity of a female tradition by recreating a chain of women writers.<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, this rediscovery of women writers is rather appropriately referred to as being an 'archaeological act'.<sup>11</sup> Seen in terms of speech, the discovery of these 'lost' women may be viewed as a means of filling in the silences of a female conversation and reconstructing an all-female dialogue which has been eclipsed by the much louder male discourse. One such 'lost' writer is Gabrielle de Bourbon who, while well known as wife of the important Louis II de la Trémoille, has received almost no credit for her role as the author of a number of devotional works. As far as I am aware, my own study is the first to examine Gabrielle's work from a literary perspective.<sup>12</sup>

Much of our knowledge about Gabrielle de Bourbon is drawn from the work of the writer Jean Bouchet, who was employed by the La Trémoille family as *procureur* and maintained a strong friendship with Gabrielle herself. Before attempting to focus in detail on her writing, it is perhaps useful to look to Bouchet's own portrait of Gabrielle for an introduction to her historical persona. Bouchet makes reference to Gabrielle in several of his works and in particular in his biography of Louis II de la Trémoille, *Le Panégyrique du Chevalier Sans Reproche* (composed c.1525).<sup>13</sup> At one point in this work, Bouchet mentions Gabrielle's literary talents, describing her process of composition in terms reminiscent of Vives (see Section 1 of this chapter):

se retiroit en son cabinet, fort bien garny de livres, lisoit quelque histoire ou chose morale ou doctrinale; et si estoit son esprit ennobly et enrichy de tant bonnes sciences, qu'elle emploioit une partie des jours à composer petiz traictez à l'honneur de Dieu, de la vierge Marie, et à l'instruction de ses damoiselles (*Panégyrique*, p.128).

Bouchet's account highlights the close association between the act of reading and that of writing, while informing us that Gabrielle's writing, devotional in inspiration, will be directed to the limited audience of her female entourage. He then continues by listing the titles of four separate texts composed by his patroness:

Elle composa en son vivant une contemplation sur la nativité et passion de Nostre Seigneur Jhesucrist, ung aultre traicté intitullé *le Chasteau de Saint Esprit*, ung aultre traicté intitullé

*L'Instruction des jeunes filles, et ung aultre traicté intitullé le Viateur (Panéyrique, p.128).*

In Bouchet's *Les Annales d'Aquitaine* (first published in 1524), the same works are recorded under the slightly differently worded titles of 'Le voyage du penitent, Le temple du S.Esprit, L'instruction des ieunes Pucelles, et les Contemplations de l'ame devote, sur le mystere de l'incarnation et passion de nostre seigneur Iesus Christ' (*Annales*, f.203 ro). Bouchet's description of these works as being 'entre autres' would suggest the one-time existence of other texts of which nothing is now known. In fact, I have been able to trace only three of the four works mentioned by Bouchet; all of which exist solely in manuscript form.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, it would appear that no copy of Gabrielle's *Instruction des Jeunes Filles* has survived, although judging by Bouchet's own advice to women, we may hazard a guess as to the nature of such a work. Not one of Gabrielle's manuscripts contains any sort of dating. At the front of the *Petit Traicté sur les Doulleurs de la Passion du Doulx Jesus et de sa Benoiste Mere*, the date 1516 has been added by a more recent reader. This suggestion is almost certainly incorrect, for we know that Gabrielle died in November 1516 and was in deep mourning throughout that year, following the death of her only son. Moreover, the *Petit Traicté* seems to have been composed before both *Le Voyage spirituel* and *Le Fort Chasteau* where we find repeated references to events occurring in the earlier work. A receipt found in the Trémoille archives indicates that money was paid to Jean Bouchet 'pour les livres de Madame qu'il a fait relier et enluminer'.<sup>15</sup> The date on this receipt, 19th April 1512, suggests that at least one of Gabrielle's texts was already written by this time. If we are to accept that Bouchet was the first to encourage his patroness to write, then it seems likely that her literary career began after 1510, when Bouchet was employed in the Trémoille household.

From Bouchet's writings, we learn that he was charged with the responsibility of communicating Gabrielle's works to learned doctors who would, no doubt, check their theological orthodoxy:

si n'estoit aucunement presumptueuse, car elle faisoit tousjours veoir et visiter ses compositions à gens de hault et bon savoir, comme je sçay, par ce que de sa grace me bailloit la charge de les faire amander (*Panéyrique*, p.128).

Gabrielle's desire for her compositions to be scrutinized and corrected by a male authority reveals a certain lack of confidence in her own ability which is confirmed by her persistent use of the modesty topos in her texts. In spite of Gabrielle's repeated apologies for her lack of talent, Bouchet, with a somewhat back-handed compliment, declares her works to be so good that they scarcely resemble feminine writing:



qui sont toutes choses si bien composées qu'on les extimerait estre plus ouvrage de gens de grans lectrés que composition de femme (*Panegyrique*, p.128).

As we have already seen, another of Bouchet's duties was to find an illuminator for Gabrielle's texts. All of the extant manuscripts contain finely executed illustrations which allow us to consider the works as important art objects in their own right. A comparison with Bouchet's own less ornate and widely printed texts seems to point to an underlying division in the conception of the male and the female book. Gabrielle's texts, as beautiful, handwritten and therefore expensive books, appear to be typical examples of feminine handiwork, pleasing, first and foremost, for their aesthetic qualities. Such was also seen to be the case with Hélienne de Crenne's book, presented, in the first instance, as a little packet draped with white silk (see Chapter 4, Section 1). In contrast, Bouchet's own books, composed for a more practical purpose, tend to be published in print, allowing as wide a dissemination as possible. The reference in *Le Panegyrique* to Gabrielle's literary pursuits leads on to a more general discussion of woman as writer. Bouchet is not, as such, opposed to women who take on the role of author. However, he is careful to divide women into distinct categories, associating education with the upper classes alone:

Aucuns trouvoyent estrange que ceste dame emploiait son esprit à composer livres, disant que ce n'estoit l'estat d'une femme, mais ce legier jugement procede d'ignorance, car en parlant de telles matieres on doit distinguer des femmes, et sçavoir de quelles maisons sont venües, si elles sont riches ou pauvres. Je suis bien d'opinion que les femmes de bas estat, et qui sont chargées et contrainctes vacquer aux choses familiares et domesticques, pour l'entretiennement de leur famille, ne doyvent vacquer aux lectres, parce que c'est chose repugnant à rusticité; mais les roynes, princesses et aultres dames qui ne se doyvent, pour la reverence de leurs estat, appliquer à mesnager comme les mecaniques, et qui ont serviteurs et servantes pour le faire, doyvent trop mieulx appliquer leurs espritz et employer le temps à vacquer aux bonnes et honnestes lectres concernans choses morales ou historiales, qui induisent à vertuz et bonnes meurs (*Panegyrique*, pp.128-29).

Bouchet's words recall the idea, discussed in my introduction, that freedom of speech is related less to gender than to position in the power hierarchy. According to Bouchet, the more women are compelled to perform traditional feminine duties ('vacquer aux choses familiares et domesticques'), the less acceptable it becomes for them to express interest in education. Opinions of this kind seem to provide at least one reason to explain why the large majority of women writers in the sixteenth century are of noble birth. However, if we are to believe Bouchet, even women of the highest rank were open to a certain amount of criticism and disapproval ('Aucuns trouvoyent estrange que ceste dame emploiait son esprit à

composer livres, disant que ce n'estoit l'estat d'une femme'). Bouchet hastily condemns such intolerance, stressing that his own personal views diverge from those of his contemporaries ('ce legier jugement procede d'ignorance', 'Je suis bien d'opinion que'). The necessity of flattering his patron does, to a certain extent, dictate Bouchet's stand-point in this thorny area of debate. However, at the same time, the author's respect and admiration for Gabrielle as a woman of letters seem genuine. Having conceded women a place, even if of a somewhat precarious nature, in the literary scene, Bouchet then lays down a set of ground rules for the composition of the feminine text. The domain of theology is firmly declared to be an area of interest for the male writer alone:

Mais se doivent garder d'appliquer leurs espritz aux curieuses questions de theologie, concernans les choses secretes de la Divinité, dont le savoir appartient seulement aux prelatz, recteurs et docteurs (*Panegyrique*, p.129).

Gabrielle, while favouring a religious subject for all her works, is careful to steer clear of theological debate of any kind. Indeed, the author is praised by Bouchet for her conformity to the specifications on female learning and her submissive avoidance of the more complex theological issues:

Elle se delectoit sur toutes choses à ouyr parler de la sainte Escripiture, sans trop avant s'enquerir des secretz de theologie; plus amoit le moral et les choses contemplatives, que les argumens et subtilitez escorchées de la lettre, par lesquelles le vray sens est souvent perverty (*Panegyrique*, p.127).

The language of theology being Latin, it is not surprising to find Bouchet insisting that the woman writer should work in the vernacular alone: 'à ceste consideracion est convenable aux femmes estre lettrées en lettres vulgaires' (*Panegyrique*, p.129). Like the treatise writers, Bouchet underlines the practical value of education as an aid for women bringing up children. Other virtues of education, such as an increase in self-esteem or a sense of intellectual attainment, are, not surprisingly, passed over in silence:

... est encores plus requis pour un aultre bien, qui en peult proceder: c'est que les enfans nourriz avec telles meres sont voluntiers plus eloquens, mieulx parlans, plus saiges et mieulx disans (*Panegyrique*, p.129).

This recommendation for the mother to train her children to speak correctly was found to be a common feature of courtesy literature (see Chapter 1, Section 1). At first sight, it seems to contradict the notion of women's speech as gossip and trivial. However, eloquent speech becomes a prerequisite of woman only when its ultimate goal lies in eliciting speech from her children:

Cornelie, mere de Grachus, ayda fort, par son continuel usaige de bien parler, à l'eloquence de ses enfans (*Panegyrique*, p.129).

Gabrielle herself is put forward by Bouchet as an example of the ideal mother who has successfully managed to find a practical application for her learning:

Toutes ces bonnes meurs et condicions ayderent fort aux perfections que monseigneur Charles son filz acquist en jeunesse (*Panegyrique*, p.128).

Bouchet's portrait of Gabrielle de Bourbon serves a dual purpose. In the first place, he adopts a didactic role, seeking to depict the image of an exemplary woman for the benefit of his female reading public. Consequently, we are confronted once again with a model of female virtue of the kind which features so frequently in courtesy literature. In addition, ever-conscious of his dependence on the patronage of the La Trémoille family, Bouchet strives to adulate Gabrielle at every possible opportunity:

... à la raison de ce que la forme de vivre de celle noble dame vault bien estre reduite à memoyre, pour la doctrine des dames qui pourront lire cy dedans, je escripray en briefves parolles ce que je y ay peu veoyr et congnoistre: c'est que ceste dame estoit devote, et pleine de grant religion, sobre, chaste, grave, sans fierté, peu parlant, magnanime sans orgueil, et non ignorant les lettres vulgaires (*Panegyrique*, pp.126-27).

Bouchet's repeated insistence on his personal acquaintance with Gabrielle is a marked feature of *Le Panegyrique* ('ce que je y ay peu veoyr et congnoistre') and betrays his pride in such an association. His frequent presentation of himself as an eyewitness of events in Gabrielle's life helps to bring alive his portrait of her. Additionally, the techniques of transcribing whole letters, and of including fictional reproductions of passages of dialogue, allow us to glimpse a more intimate side of the author's character. Bouchet focuses on a number of episodes from Gabrielle's life, devoting extended sections of his work to the narration of events such as her first meeting with Louis de La Trémoille, their marriage (in 1484) and her son's death (in 1515). One particularly touching episode recorded by Bouchet is the death of Gabrielle herself in November 1516. Entering into the couple's privacy, he reveals, in detail, the last words spoken by Gabrielle to her husband. In accordance with her exemplary life, the speech Bouchet reconstructs is a declaration of Gabrielle's chastity, fidelity and obedience, which serves to transform her into an illustration of Bouchet's own model of the perfect woman. Consequently, Bouchet may be said to use the figure of Gabrielle as a mouthpiece or a puppet made to speak, not so much her own words, but the language which men desired to hear:



Et parce que à noz espousailles, prins de vous l'anneau de la connexité de noz cueurs, par sa rondeur signiffiée, laquelle doit estre entiere sans aulcune corruption, comme demonstre la purité de l'or, je le vous rends non viollé. macullé, ne corrompu des vices à conjugalle chasteté contraires. Je n'ay memoyre d'avoir faict chose qui vous deust desplaire... mais, par deue obeissance, me suis tousjours efforcée de vous complaire (*Panégyrique*, p.202).

#### Writing for 'gens simples'

At the end of *Le Voyage spirituel*, Gabrielle de Bourbon underlines her motives for writing such a text:

ay fait ce petit traicté qui pourra à gens simples qui n'entendent la sainte escripture en plus que moy valloir pour eulx mettre en la bonne voye [pp.54-55].

Such words reveal her general concern with producing a text which will be readily comprehensible to an audience of little education. Elsewhere, she defines this reading public more specifically, including women in her audience:

Petites contemplations qui seront plus plaisantes à ouyr à pauvres femmeletes et simples gens que les haultes et profondes escriptures des saints docteurs (*Fort Chasteau*, [p.75]).

All Gabrielle's texts are composed with a didactic intent. Sensitive to the needs of her particular readers, she seeks to construct works which will be morally edifying and at the same time clear, plain and appealing. The author finds a solution to all these requirements in her use of allegory as a medium for writing every one of her texts. By means of what may be called 'personification allegory', Gabrielle succeeds in animating abstract notions, which take on a visual, human form. Around these personified abstractions, the author builds stories, using her characters as actors in her rather theatrical presentation of Christian truth.<sup>16</sup> Through allegory, Gabrielle is able to translate unseen notions, which are difficult to comprehend, into perceptible images which may be more easily grasped by an unenlightened reading public. The pictorial element of allegory allows for the creation of an attractive and imaginative narrative, serving as the sugar-coating on the bitter pill. Indeed, allegory proves to be an appropriate aid to didacticism; the constant need to interpret and unveil meaning ensuring that reading will be an active rather than a passive act. Thus, without having recourse to complex theological debate or authorial intervention, Gabrielle may transform the invisible into the visible, and thereby both charm and instruct her audience of 'pauvres

femmeletes' and 'gens simples'. It is this sustained use of the allegorical mode which has unjustly earned Gabrielle the reputation, among certain critics, for monotonous verbosity:

On ne trouve dans ces deux ouvrages, il fallait s'y attendre, que de longues allégories fort peu intéressantes en général.<sup>17</sup>

Criticism of this kind seems coloured by continuing prejudices against women's writing ('il fallait s'y attendre') and will, I hope, in the course of this brief study, be shown to be unfounded.

Unlike Hélienne de Crenne or Marguerite de Navarre, Gabrielle de Bourbon distances herself from her own narratives, allowing no element of confusion between narrator and author. At no point, in any of her works, does Gabrielle intervene in her narratives either by commenting or passing judgement on the events related. As will be seen later, the absence of the author may largely be explained by her general lack of confidence in her role as a female writer. In Gabrielle's long prose treatise entitled *Petit Traicté sur les Douleurs de la Passion du Doulx Jesus et de sa Benoiste Mere*, two protagonists, introduced to us as the *Cœur contemplatif* and the *Ame devote*, are entrusted with the role of narrating the sequence of events. A comparison with a poem such as Marguerite's *Le Miroir* highlights the somewhat impersonal nature of Gabrielle's work, in which the author silently retreats into the background, relegating the narration of her text to fictional characters. From the very beginning, it is clear that Gabrielle's *Ame devote* has little, if anything, in common with Marguerite's own 'âme pécheresse'. As has already been seen, the Soul in Marguerite's text has an unknown identity, being a disembodied voice which we may assume to be Marguerite's, but which we could also adopt as our own. Gabrielle's *Ame devote* is immediately recognizable as an independent entity, a defined persona quite distinct from the author herself. Indeed, the very use of the dialogue form between the *Ame devote* and the *Cœur contemplatif* ensures that they will be regarded as fictional characters. The *Petit Traicté* is divided into two distinctly different parts; the first focusing on Christ's passion and the suffering of the Virgin Mary, the second, written in a more positive mood, relating the joys experienced by Mary both at the birth of her son and at her own glorious death. The work has an episodic structure, consisting of a long series of contemplations in the form of dramatic tableaux, witnessed by both the *Cœur contemplatif* and the *Ame devote*. This tight structure, provided by the tableaux, stands in direct contrast to the rambling monologue of *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*. Indeed, we are now safely in the defined framework of the Catholic faith, far from Marguerite's world of uncertainty and ambiguity. It immediately becomes obvious that the relationship between these two narrator/protagonists is an unbalanced one. Retaining traditional roles (suggested by the genders of the personifications themselves), Gabrielle chooses to depict the *Cœur* as a more dominant male figure, acting as

guide and spiritual mentor to the submissive female Soul. These roles are maintained throughout the *Petit Traicté*, where we find the male Heart constantly urging the Soul to observe and learn from the religious scenes witnessed. In this way, the tableaux come to serve as important teaching aids for the Heart's programme of instruction. In line with their gender roles, the Heart and Soul are characterized by the language they speak. The Soul's speech consists of a series of questions and requests for explanations of the tableaux observed:

Je te prie cuer dy moy que fait celle belle vierge ainsi si seulle  
[p.48].

In contrast, the *Cueur contemplatif* is by far the more confident speaker of the pair; his speech lacking the hesitations and doubts seen in that of the *Ame devote*. The language of his speeches is the masculine language of authority, instructing rather than enquiring:

Ame je t'ay monsté quatre devotes contemplacions. Retirons  
nous à part pour les rememorer et si bien elles sont empruntés  
[sic] en nostre entendement il ne nous fault aultre passetemps,  
car assez nous avons matiere pour l'exploicter unesfois joyeuse  
et moult consollable aultresfois dolante [p.72].

During the second part of the *Petit Traicté*, as the Soul begins to understand and profit from the Heart's instruction, her speech correspondingly becomes more confident:

Quant je auroys demouré dix ans en la plus grant estude du  
monde, si n'auroys je point tant proffité que j'ay depuis le  
temps qu'il t'a pleu que je t'aye suyvy et puis qu'il te plaist, je  
me voys retirer et de point en point ce que j'ay veu et ouy, je  
mectray en memoire pour y-proffiter le temps advenir [p.77].

The continual question/answer structure of the protagonists' dialogue immediately calls to mind a parallel with the traditional catechism. Indeed, remembering Gabrielle's concern with providing moral education for an unversed reading public, it seems possible to assume that the instruction received by the personified Soul is also intended for Gabrielle's readers in general. The Soul would then appear to represent a kind of model reader, to be emulated by the real reader. Thus, without directly addressing her audience, Gabrielle finds a discreet method of teaching them how to read and interpret religious stories. Gabrielle anticipates possible questions which her reading public may pose, placing such queries in the mouth of the *Ame devote*. In this way, she may avoid any chance of belittling or humiliating her readers by constantly reminding them of their own need for self-amelioration. At the same time, the author may ensure that, through identification with the Soul, her readers will be in no doubt as to the manner in which to interpret her text. If we are to view the *Ame devote* as a model for the reader, then surely the *Cueur contemplatif* must become a substitute for the

author herself? Assuming this to be the case, we may witness Gabrielle, behind the mask of a male character, carefully guiding her inexperienced audience through the complex process of reading. Seen in this light, the *Petit Traicté* becomes a rather inward-looking piece of writing, examining and playing out the roles of both author and reader.

In a work where the didactic aim relies on a pictorial presentation of events, it is not surprising to find the Soul/reader repeatedly being encouraged to sharpen her sense of sight. Verbs denoting the act of looking and witnessing become key words, underlining the importance of the visual element in Gabrielle's writing:

Ame devote je te prie que de l'oeil de ton entendement tu *regardes* ta maistresse, mere de dieu et dame de tout le monde [p.3].

O ame devote vien... et tu *verras* choses tant fortes à croire que si tu ne l'avoys *veu* à payne le croyras tu. *Regarde* comment la grant croix luy est mise sur les espaules [p.14].

The observation of each scene is accompanied by an explanatory speech delivered by the Heart himself. This combination of pictorial plus verbal explanation provides the basic didactic structure of the *Petit Traicté*. Interestingly, in *Le Fort Chasteau*, Gabrielle includes a direct reference to the value of this mnemonic method of instruction. In her description of the castle's refectory, she draws our attention to the walls lined with tapestries, which inspire the stories read aloud to the resident souls:

La tapisserie... c'estoit la vie des saints. Et ainsi comme il est de coustume aux devotz convents, il y avoit ung lecteur qui lisoit qui se nommoit entendement, qui donnoit à entendre par la lecture aux bonnes ames les vies parfaites de saints dont la tapisserie en faisoit recongnissance (*Fort Chasteau*, [p.71]).<sup>18</sup>

Each tableau of the *Petit Traicté* forms a self-contained theatrical production where spoken dialogue helps to convey a sense of immediacy and draw the onlookers into the scene. Having recommended the Soul to pay careful attention to the visual details of the tableaux, the *Cœur contemplatif* also encourages her to listen attentively to the words uttered:

Mectz ton entente à bien diligemment *escouter* [p.3].

*Escoute* luy *escoute* ame devote comme notre dieu se complainct et dit qu'il a soef [p.28].

Examples such as these point to Gabrielle's choice of a method of education which is principally reliant on sensory perception rather than logical reasoning. Serving as the author's mouthpiece, the Heart informs the Soul/reader that the images and dialogues of the scenes



witnessed provide a more palatable presentation of religious truths than long theological tracts:

Vien au pied de la sainte croix car à une heure bien exploitée  
tu y apprendras plus que en ung an oyant la leçon de tous les  
theologiens du monde [p.43].

Seeking to instruct by calling on the reader's intuition, Gabrielle is careful to make sure that the content of the tableaux will appeal, in particular, to the emotions of the audience. In the case of the two protagonists, her goal is achieved, for the pair never fail to be emotionally moved by the episodes they observe:

Je ne pense pas qu'il y aye cuer si dur qui ne se deust pour  
ceste contemplacion pasmer de joye et de compacion [p.63].

Indeed, the first part of the *Petit Traicté* is dominated by the recurring motif of the shedding of tears. All the tableaux in this section prove to contain scenes guaranteed to provoke tears from both the Heart and the Soul:

O ame devote empruntons toy et moy toute l'eau de la mer pour  
plorer tant de douleurs [p.7].

Tears of this kind would seem to have a cathartic rather than a negative purpose. At the end of the first part, *Ame devote* declares that such tableaux have made her become too sorrowful and asks to be shown more joyful scenes:

Cueur contemplatif... qu'il te plaise lire quelque leçon où je me  
puisse en joye estre [p.45].

The Soul's request brings about the turning point of the *Petit Traicté*. From now onwards, the tear motif vanishes, replaced by an altogether more positive mood:

Tu as gecté habondence de larmes qui te vauldront plus que ne  
te scarois dire ne par escript je te donner [sic] à entendre. Or...  
je te monstrey chose de grant admiracion et qui te donneront  
grant cause de joye espirituelle en laquelle tu pourras beaucoup  
proffiter pour ton salut [p.47].

The Heart's lesson on the importance of the emotions in the process of self-improvement may serve as a signal to the readers themselves as to the particular frame of mind they are required to adopt when reading.

The role of the *Ame devote* and the *Cueur contemplatif* in the *Petit Traicté* is an ever-changing one. At times, the protagonists stand back to become detached, uninvolved onlookers of the religious scenes:

Ame cachons nous en quelque petit coing et nous verrons  
choses à toutes creatures impossibles fors à celluy dont ils  
procedent [p.75].

On other occasions, they walk onto the empty stage after the last lines have been spoken and the 'actors' have left:

O ame devote frotons nous toy et moy en ceste coulonne affin  
que serons paincts de ce precieulx sang qui pour nous est  
respendu [p.11].

However, more usually, the narrators drop their role of passive observers and actually enter the tableaux, mingling and conversing with the characters themselves. Conversations between the Heart and the Virgin Mary occur at regular intervals throughout the narrative. It is, perhaps, these moments which allow for the greatest element of authorial imagination in the *Petit Traicté*. Gabrielle's use of an allegorical personification as narrator may now become more readily understandable. As a fictional intermediary, the Heart may be depicted in a role which would have been unacceptable for the author herself. As he talks with the Virgin Mary, the Heart continues to play the role of guide, companion and consoler, now elucidating the mysteries of the scenes for the benefit of Mary as well:

Reconnoistrez vous votre tant doux enfant? Je croy que non  
et je le vous monstrey madame, car ainsi comme je vous  
avoye promis, je l'ay tousiours suivy et à cest heure je me rend  
en votre compaignie pour porter ma part des douleurs que  
endureriez [p.14].

Thus, a chain is established whereby the reader observes the Soul and the Heart, who in turn observe the Virgin Mary, who is observing the suffering of her son. A reading of the *Petit Traicté* reveals that the title of the work is somewhat misleading. Gabrielle's text focuses above all on the figure of Mary, taking a similar form to the traditional Lives of the Virgin widely printed in the sixteenth century. The series of tableaux moves from scenes of the last hours of Christ's life, to his death and resurrection, then back in time to his birth, and finally to the Virgin Mary's death and Assumption. The climax of the work is the last and longest tableau which enacts the Assumption of the Virgin, depicting her being carried to heaven in a jewel encrusted carriage. It seems possible that Gabrielle's choice of tableaux, which are in turn, sorrowful, joyful and glorious, is a deliberate attempt to parallel the form of the rosary. Each tableau, a meditation in itself, would then represent one of the beads from the circlet. The comparison seems even more pertinent if we remember that the *Petit Traicté* was intended for a female audience; the use of a rosary being a particularly female devotion at the time when Gabrielle was writing. Gabrielle's work may, therefore, be termed as a visual rosary, an aid to guide the uneducated in their everyday prayer and meditation. Moreover, the

very shape of the rosary, made from a ring of beads, brings us back once again to the theme of the typical feminine text as being circular in form. No more than the briefest comparison with Marguerite de Navarre's writing immediately highlights the thoroughly Catholic nature of Gabrielle's narratives. Interestingly, both *Le Miroir* and the *Petit Traicté* are concerned with the process of reading. However, the method of reading advocated in each case points to the authors' widely differing religious convictions. As was seen earlier in this chapter, Marguerite's readers are encouraged to achieve self-improvement by means of biblical reading. In contrast, Gabrielle's readers are most certainly not left with the freedom to read the Bible for themselves; an activity which could lead to dangerous misinterpretation. Consequently, Gabrielle's writing lacks the biblical framework of *Le Miroir*, basing itself on a mixture of biblical stories, legends and purely fictional material. The fictional side of the *Petit Traicté*, a major element in the work, tends to undermine its status as a piece of serious theological writing, which is, no doubt, exactly the effect Gabrielle intended to create.

#### Writing as a Scribe

While choosing to delegate her narrative duties to a fictional character, Gabrielle does not disappear completely from her texts. However, on her infrequent appearances in her works, she always depicts herself in the role of the writer. An examination of the nature of Gabrielle's self-characterization points to her over-whelming modesty as a female author. A clear illustration of this may be found in the *Petit Traicté*, where Gabrielle reveals that, along with the Soul and the readers in general, she too must be guided by the lessons of the *Cœur contemplatif*:

Pour tousjours esmouvoir les cueurs à devotion m'est prins  
vouloir de mectre par escript quelques petites contemplations  
sur certains points de la douloureuse passion du doulx jesus,  
ainsi que le cœur contemplatif m'enseigne. Combien que c'est  
une chose de quoy je me scay tresmal aider que de mectre telle  
chose par escript [p.2].

Gabrielle's submission to this male, albeit imaginary, authority underlines her lack of confidence in her creative ability. Moreover, here, and in her other works, she declares that the idea to write is not self-instigated, but springs from obedience to a request for her to play this particular role:

Le cœur contemplatif avoit voulu que je misse par escript  
quelques petites contemplacions sur la passion du bon Jhesus et  
de sa doulce mere [p.44].

Such claims may no doubt be attributed to the somewhat guilty conscience experienced by a sixteenth-century woman writer when adding her own voice to an essentially male 'conversation'. Gabrielle's insistence that she is writing with the voice of the *Cœur contemplatif*, rather than with her own, may remind us of Erasmus' words of advice to women speakers. It is certainly true that, as a writer, Gabrielle strives to submit to the traditional female model of courtesy literature, 'talking' as quietly and as unobtrusively as possible, while displaying nothing of her individuality:

On n'empêche pas une femme de parler; on lui défend de crier et de faire trop de bruit. Quand il y a quelque chose d'importance à faire; il est plus convenable qu'elle l'ordonne de la part de son mari, que de la sienne. Car de cette manière elle parlera avec plus d'autorité.... Elle ne doit pas crier: Je le veux ainsi, je l'ordonne ainsi. Il convient mieux de parler de cette sorte: Votre maître le veut ainsi; je ne voudrais pas que mon mari sût cela (*Mariage Chrétien*, quoted from Chapter 1).

By claiming to be no more than an accessory in the creation of her text, Gabrielle reduces her status of author to the inferior position of scribe. She succeeds in eclipsing her personality to such an extent that, as readers, our only impression of Gabrielle is as a somewhat elusive figure, a nervous author who dares take up her pen only in order to perform the rather insignificant task of noting down ideas which are dictated to her: 'Prens encre plume et papier pour mettre en escript ce que tu oyeras' (*Voyage*, [p.1]). Indeed, in the *Voyage spirituel*, anxious to avoid imposing her own voice, the author allows the fictional protagonist to dictate the subject matter and even the format of the text she is writing:

Et de ce petit voyage spirituel feras sept chapitres qui contiendront les journées principales que j'ay faictes avant que peusse parvenir au port de salut [p.2].

In both the *Petit Traicté* and the *Voyage spirituel*, Gabrielle depicts herself in a rather unflattering manner, allowing her own characters to chide and reprimand her for her literary idleness:

Sus fille de paresse, lieve toy, car trop longuement as esté endormie et prens ta plume, car longtemps a que par ton paresseux sejour ne fiz oeuvre qui à toy ny à aultre aye proffité (*Petit Traicté*, [p.45]).

Gabrielle's self-portrait as a scribe seems to be a technique to protect herself against criticism for speaking too boldly; it may also be part of a general overall modesty topos. It is surely not by chance that we find Marguerite de Navarre adopting an identical role in her poem *La Coche*, where she declares her writing to be no more than a direct transcription of the words spoken by the three ladies. This general tendency of the author towards self-effacement,

undermining the importance of the literary act, would thus seem to be a characteristic of the sixteenth-century woman writer. Indeed, the only example of a male 'scribe' that I have come across is the rather reluctant author of the *Evangiles des Quenouilles*, whose creative talents are denied him by a group of women eager to seek revenge on the male sex in general (see Chapter 3, Section 2).

As has been the case with many of the women writers examined so far, Gabrielle makes extensive use of the traditional modesty topos. Her claims of inadequacy as a female writer ('saichent tous ceulx qui le liront qu'il est fait d'oeuvre femmenine, seront exculsées les fautes', *Fort Chasteau* [p.62]) are so persistent that the reader is no longer able to consider them as mere rhetorical devices. One interesting facet of her use of the topos is to draw herself into a close relationship with her reading public. Having declared her readers to consist of 'gens simples' and 'pauvres femmeletes', Gabrielle then implies that, as a writer, she is in fact no different from her audience:

ay faict ce petit traicté qui pourra à gens simples qui n'entendent la sainte escripture *en plus que moy....* (*Voyage*. [p.54]).

Il fut possible à beaucopt plus scavante que moy de rediger par escript les tant proffitables leçons que le saint docteur list aux devotes ames.... Toutesfoys à l'ayde de celuy soubz la main duquel je besoigne car à chascun il depart de ses graces, aux grans entendemens bien fondés en science il les conduit à mettre par escript les haultes et proffitables matieres. Et aux *simples personnages et femmenins entendemens* leur fait ceste grand grace de leur donner sçavoir et pouvoir descrire quelques petites contemplations (*Fort Chasteau*, [p.75]).

The modesty topos usually serves as a device for distancing the author from the reader (often defined as the writer's patron), who is made to feel superior to the humble writer. The more the author insists on his own inferiority, the more he will distance and alienate himself from his reader. In Gabrielle's case, the modesty topos obtains the opposite result, for instead of separating author and reader, it actually serves to draw them together. Gabrielle places herself on the same level as her audience, claiming that she too may profit from the moral teaching of the text. In this way, she finds a solution to writing works for an uneducated reading public without condescendingly causing them to experience a sense of inferiority or shame.

In all her works, we find Gabrielle becoming trapped between a desire for accurate expression and an exaggerated fear of prolixity. The repeated appearance of phrases such as 'm'en tays à cause de briefveté' highlights the predicament of the woman writer fearing the commonplace male criticism of feminine verbosity. This tension is especially well-illustrated

in *Le Fort Chateau* where Gabrielle vacillates between writing freely and submitting to the precept of female silence:

Je m'en tays pour cause de briefveté.... Toutesfois quelque prolicité de quoy je puisse estre reprinse si fault il que je die que.... [p.68].<sup>19</sup>

Another motif which frequently recurs in Gabrielle's writing is her inability to speak as eloquently as she desires:

Mon entendement n'est assez suffisant pour mectre en escript tout ce que je y veis (*Fort Chateau*, [p.66]).

Je ne sçay comment je doys commencer à en parler (*Fort Chateau*, [p.67]).

This obsessive preoccupation with the manner in which to express oneself is a feature of feminine writing in general. Uncertain as to the reaction of her attempts to write a narrative, Gabrielle seems to overcompensate by distracting all attention away from the authorial figure. Her works do, therefore, have a rather impersonal feel to them. Aware that it is presumptuous for a woman to speak, she attempts to displace all responsibility for her writing onto another authority, obediently writing with an alien voice, while humbly apologizing for any scribal errors she may have made in transcribing another's words.

### Journeying to Heaven

*Le Voyage spirituel entrepris par l'ame devote* is another example of an allegorical account, this time depicting the journey of a Soul through the temptations of life in order to enter heaven and become a bride of Christ. The Soul is accompanied by *Bon Vouloir*, *Force* and *Esperance*, who advise her to carry a bundle of all the good works and deeds she has accumulated throughout her life. In her bag, which will be a necessary article for entry into heaven, the Soul carries:

tous mes bienfaictz aulmosnes, oeuvres charitables, jusnes, abstinences, disciplines, oraisons, obeissances aux commandemens de dieu et de l'eglise, vraye foye ainsi qu'elle est contenue ès douze articles, accomplissemens des oeuvres de misericorde, vertus acquises, batailles gaignées contre tentations et, en effet, de tous les biens que j'ay peu acquerir je les ay gardés pour me servir et enclos en ceste bourse [p.7].

The journey to heaven is presented in terms of a seven day pilgrimage, the Soul repeatedly being referred to as 'pelerine'. A brief study of Gabrielle's depiction of this journey reveals the Catholicity of her writing. In contrast to Marguerite de Navarre's *Le Miroir* or *Dialogue*,

the journey is seen to be motivated, not by faith, but by *Bon Vouloir*: 'lequel est le principal motif de mon entreprise' [p.2]. Prayers to the saints and especially to the Virgin Mary form an essential part of the Soul's preparations for her pilgrimage. The author's insistence that Mary will act as advocate in heaven contrasts sharply with Charlotte's words of warning to her aunt in the *Dialogue*:

En grand erreur vostre cueur on a myz  
De vous dire que aultre que Jesus Christ,  
Soit advocat pour nous en paradis  
(*Dialogue*, ll.358-60).

Gabrielle's Soul succeeds in keeping her white bridal dress impeccably clean throughout the duration of her journey. Anticipation of meeting her future bridegroom is the incentive for the Soul's sinless life:

Rejouys toy ma fille mamye, car je t'asseure pour verité que au  
parfaict de notre voyage tu gaigneras ung espoux qui te  
couronnera de couronne royale comme royne [p.7].

Unlike Marguerite's Soul who receives the love of her husband through divine grace alone, the Soul in the *Voyage spirituel* must trade in her bundle of good works in exchange for her heavenly crown:

Ha chere fille, je estime tant les tresors que tu m'as acquis au  
monde, de quoy tu m'as fait present, que du moingdre je t'en  
donneray telle recompense [p.54].

The marriage between Christ and the Soul is then symbolized by the placing of a ring on the Soul's finger. Less conscious of contemporary debates than Jean Bouchet is in his own writing, Gabrielle seems to have no qualms about playing down the role of both faith and grace in the journey of her Soul. A comparison with his own later depiction of a Soul's life, *Les Triumphe de la noble et amoureuse dame* (printed in 1530) reveals that contentious areas of doctrine, such as the Soul's entry into heaven, are diplomatically avoided by Bouchet.<sup>20</sup> Gabrielle's apparent ignorance of current theological disputes is, no doubt, a point in her favour for, as Bouchet so clearly declares, a sixteenth-century woman who attempts to dabble in debate of this kind may be deemed far from praiseworthy.

References throughout the *Voyage*, inform the reader that this Soul is, in fact, the *Ame devote* already observed in the *Petit Traicté*. The *Voyage* may, therefore, be considered as representing a kind of sequel to the earlier work. Having taken good heed of the Heart's instruction, the Soul is now spiritually ready to make her journey to heaven. The *Cœur contemplatif*, no longer necessary as a guide, is absent from the *Voyage*, but his lessons are, nonetheless, recalled from time to time by the Soul:

Les ungs prenoient plaisir à edifier chasteaulx et villes si belles que si n'eust esté que aultrefois avoys esté transportée avecques le cueur contemplatif eusse pensé qu'il n'eust point fait plus beau en la noble cité de bon repos [p.31].

In fact, it is the memory of the last magnificent tableau depicting the Assumption which acts as the force motivating the Soul's desire to return to the heavenly realms:

Car depuis la grant triumphe de gloire que je vy que l'on vous fist à votre arrivée en ceste noble cité de bon repos, oncques puis mon esperit ne cessa de querir tous les moyens pour en icelle parvenir, vous suppliant très humblement madame... me vouloir conduire au port de salut [p.10].

The Soul's new, more confident role becomes evident when we examine her relationship with the author. No longer submissive, the Soul replaces the *Cueur contemplatif* in dictating the subject matter of the *Voyage* to Gabrielle:

Prens encre, plume et papier pour mettre en escript ce que tu oyeras de mon voyage spirituel.... te desclaireray toutes les peynes et labeurs que j'ay heues en faisant ce saint voyage, aussi les joyes et consolations que j'en ay à la fin receues. Et si le tout tu scez bien mettre et rediger par escript, il pourra valoir à ceulx qui desirent parvenir au port de salut et à la noble cité de bon repoux [pp.1-2].

It would seem that the Heart's lessons have paid off, for the Soul in the *Voyage* appears to speak exactly the same language as her male mentor. Thus, on a fictional level, by means of the Soul's spiritual development, we may see how it is possible for a woman to learn to read and even express herself like a man. Bearing in mind the Soul's new status in the *Voyage*, we may begin to question what such a change implies for the readers themselves. Urged to identify with and emulate the *Ame devote* throughout her spiritual pupillage, the reading public of the *Voyage* must now attempt to follow a more taxing example. It has been suggested that the *Voyage Spirituel* is an account of the life of a saint rather than an ordinary woman.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Bouchet's *Triumphes* depicts a Soul who, unlike Gabrielle's, is unable to resist the temptation of sin. Bouchet's Soul, together with her companions, is seduced by the *Prince de Volupté* and his cohorts. While describing this fall into sin, Bouchet seizes the opportunity to underline the relevance of such scenes which may serve as a warning to the sixteenth-century woman reader. In one particularly colourful scene, the character *Chair* is depicted in the act of corrupting the ingenuous maiden, *Volunté*:

approcha sa bouche de celle de Volunté, et après l'avoir baisée commença taster son virginal testin, ce qu'elle permist, luy defendant le demourant, qui estoit folle à elle, car à peine l'un est sans l'autre. Et voylà la forme et maniere comment les



jeunes mondains deçoivent plusieurs filles et femmes qui leur  
presentent les aureilles et donnent lieu à leurs deceptives parolles  
(*Triumphes*, f.lxvii vo).

Interventions such as this one point to one of the most notable differences between the *Voyage* and the *Triumphes*.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Bouchet, Gabrielle sustains her allegory throughout, without interrupting her narrative in order to clarify and explain the allegorical meaning. Bouchet, on the contrary, as we have seen, refuses to remain completely in the background and repeatedly intervenes to remind his readers of his presence as omniscient author. No such passages of instruction exist in Gabrielle's work, where the readers are left to draw their own conclusions. Remembering Gabrielle's extreme modesty in the *Petit Traicté*, it is no great surprise to find her avoiding the role of authoritative writer.

A comparison of the *Voyage* with one of the popular saints' lives reveals Gabrielle's Soul to be a typical saintly model. This parallel is confirmed by the author herself who pictures the Soul, on her arrival in heaven, joining a whole host of female saints including St Ursula, St Catherine, St Barbara and St Margaret:

Mes filles, allez recueillir [sic] une de voz seurs pour estre votre  
compaigne en gloire qu'elle a esté en vertus en traversant les  
penalitez du monde [p.53].

The Soul's title of 'Pelerine' is, at this point, transformed into the more prestigious rank of 'la sainte ame devote'. Throughout the *Voyage*, we witness the Soul being assailed by the servants of the *Monde* (mostly male personifications). It is interesting to find, on one occasion, the character *Presumption* striving to persuade the Soul to reject the traditional books written for women, in favour of more attractive reading matter:

Veulx tu croire ung tas de bigotz qui ont fait livres pour donner  
crainte aux pauvres ignorans comme toy [p.19].

These books are, no doubt, etiquette books, full of moral advice for the woman reader. Seeking to lure the innocent soul, her would-be seducers put forward a behavioural model which reverses all the precepts of courtesy literature:

Et telles y en a qui avoient voulu prendre la voye telle que tu  
prens, mais depuis que à elles j'ay parlé ne se sont point  
voulues tenir à leur folle oppinion et bien s'en sont trouvées.  
Regardes commant elles sont bien empoint, testes levées sans  
crainte, parolles hardies et sans estre de nul reprises, rire,  
chanter, bancqueter, aller jouer chascune à son plaisir, habitz  
de toutes sortes [p.33].

The Soul's companions alert her to be wary of the seduction of male rhetoric and recommend her to reply with silence: 'ne respons point aux faulces questions, ne prens plaisir aux

delicieuses et odorantes senteurs' [p.23]. However, the Soul is now a bold enough speaker to resist the pursuers herself, chiding them angrily in a manner not dissimilar to the articulate female saints observed in Chapter 2, Section 4:

Ta parolle est si meschante que je m'esbays que nul n'y peult  
adjouster foy. Si tu as deceu par ton affecte langaige quelques  
pauvres pellerines qui seront tard à repentir, de moy n'en ira  
pas ainsi [p.34].

The picturesque, theatrical element, which was found to be a common feature of hagiographical literature, is far from absent from Gabrielle's *Voyage*. Remembering that to be successful in its didactic aim her narrative must retain the reader's attention throughout, Gabrielle is particularly concerned with presenting a story which will appeal to her audience in general. Consequently, her personifications are well developed characters, being much more than mere illustrations of abstract notions. Gabrielle seeks to keep the reader's interest alive by varying the nature of the obstacles encountered by the Soul on each of the seven days. An extract from one particularly lively scene may serve as proof of the success of Gabrielle's story line. As the Soul and her companions move through the lands belonging to the *Prince Monde*, they are assaulted by a band of robbers. A rather humourous fight ensues in which *Force* leaps to the defence of the Soul:

Quant force vit qu'il mectoit la main en sa bonne pellerine,  
commanca à monsther son povoir et haussa son bourdon et  
donna tel cop à faulx rapport... qu'il demoura par terre [p.38].

Something of a contradiction seems to arise from Gabrielle's desire to provide an example for 'pauvres-femmeletes', and the impossibility of imitating the exemplary life she depicts. This is, of course, the paradox underlying all hagiographical literature destined for a lay readership. In Chapter 2, the hagiographical genre was seen to be a particularly masculine mode of writing. Not wishing to 'speak out of turn' or draw unnecessary attention to herself as a writer, Gabrielle opts to conform to an established masculine literary tradition. However, while depicting a Soul who has many of the characteristics of the saintly model, Gabrielle omits any of the typical, harrowing scenes of torture which focus on the disfiguring or destruction of the female saint's body. Thus it may be that, through her silence, Gabrielle is timidly attempting to stage an unobtrusive protest against a side of didactic literature which is particularly humiliating for the average woman reader.

## 3. Catherine d'Amboise (d.1550)

Another name which may justifiably be added to the list of 'lost' women writers is that of Catherine d'Amboise. Her two works, composed during the first half of the sixteenth century, are seldom mentioned in even the most recent studies of this period.<sup>23</sup> The earlier of the two, entitled *Le Livre des Prudens et Imprudens des Siècles Passés* (1509), is a prose work, consisting of a long catalogue of moral exempla drawn from biblical, historical, and mythological sources.<sup>24</sup> A brief survey of the text immediately reveals both the breadth and diversity of Catherine's own reading, accountable, no doubt, to her privileged position as a member of the royal court.<sup>25</sup> As the title suggests, the second text, *Les Devotes Epistres*, is written in a rather different tone, falling into the category of devotional literature.<sup>26</sup> Neither work was published until the nineteenth century; a factor which may explain why these texts seem to be so little known, even by Catherine's own contemporaries.

*Les Devotes Epistres* is divided into seven parts, each one linked to the next to form a cohesive narrative. The work opens with a letter to Christ, written and signed by Catherine d'Amboise herself. In this missive, carried to Christ by the author's guardian angel, Catherine confesses her sinful behaviour and pleads for forgiveness. Following the appeal to Christ, we find a letter imploring the Virgin Mary to act on the author's behalf; the nature of her request confirming the Catholicity of Catherine's religious leanings. Other sections consist of three transitional *Envoys* and a *Chant Royal* in praise of the Virgin. Momentum is sustained throughout all six of these parts, heightening the reader's anticipation of reaching the climax of the work, the letter sent by Christ himself.

'Escript au lieu segrect'

At the beginning of the prologue to the *Livre des Prudens et Imprudens*, the author describes her withdrawal from company in order to give free expression to her grief, provoked, as we are later informed, by the recent death of her parents, husband and child<sup>27</sup>:

me retire en mon petit cabinet où j'ay de coustume me retraire  
pour faire mes lamentacions et femynins regrettz (f.1 vo).

It is also in this 'petit cabinet' that Catherine will compose the text of *Le Livre des Prudens* itself. Similarly, towards the end of her letter to Christ in *Les Devotes Epistres*, the author refers a second time to her separation from public life to a private place in which she has been able to write this confession: 'Escript au lieu segrect de ta maison/ De Lynières

(pp.xxix-xxx). Catherine's references to her need for a solitary, closed room in order to produce a literary composition highlight a theme which may be found in almost all the texts by women studied so far. Bouchet himself, in his description of Gabrielle de Bourbon's process of writing, singles out her habit of isolating herself both to read and to compose her works: 'se retiroit en son cabinet, fort bien garny de livres... elle emploioit une partie des jours à composer petiz traictez' (*Panegyrique*, p.128). For Hélienne de Crenne, imprisonment in a locked room turns out, paradoxically, to provide a welcome refuge where feelings may be openly expressed both aloud and on paper: 'Me retiray en ma chambre où j'estoys plus volontiers seule qu'accompagnée' (*Angoysses*, p.30). Yet again, in *La Coche*, we find the same theme when we witness the narrator searching for a private place away from the bustle of court life where she may write in peace:

La nuict me feist aux troys donner l'adieu,  
Non pour dormir, mais pour trouver ung lieu,  
Où, sans avoir de nul empeschement,  
Peusse acquitter ma promesse et serment  
(*La Coche*, ll.1320-23).

Reference to the creation of a text in a private or hidden location would appear to be a characteristic of feminine writing alone. Most sixteenth-century male writers seem to set little store by such precisions, no doubt considering them to be superfluous details. However, in several works where the place of composition is specified, we quickly come to see that the male writer conceives literary composition as a much more public act than his female contemporaries do. A few pertinent examples may serve to illustrate this point. Indeed, in line with the general tone of *Gargantua*, it is perhaps no great surprise to find Rabelais joyously announcing this text to have been written during one of his drinking sprees:

Car, à la composition de ce livre seigneurial, je ne perdiz ny employay oncques plus, ny aultre temps que celluy qui estoit estably à prendre ma refection corporelle, sçavoir est, beuvant et mangeant. Aussi est ce la juste heure d'escrire ces haultes matieres et sciences profondes, comme bien faire sçavoit Homere, paragon de tous philologes, et Ennie, pere des poëtes latins (*Gargantua*, p.17).

The implication, in this case, would seem to be that the author was not alone when composing *Gargantua* and may even have been in a place as public as a tavern or an eating-house. It would seem that the case of Rabelais is not an isolated example. In a letter addressed to Jean Botzheim, the writer Erasmus depicts a somewhat humorous occasion when he composed one of his poems perched on the back of a horse:

Mon poëme sur la *Vieillesse*, dédié à Guillaume Cop, a été composé dans les Alpes, lors de mon premier voyage en

Italie.... Voilà comment, pour tromper mon ennui tout en chevauchant, je m'abstenais de toute conversation. J'ai ainsi terminé le poème, en prenant parfois quelques notes, le papier appuyé sur la selle, de peur d'oublier une chose en cherchant une autre.... Voilà donc un poème équestre.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, we return to the idea, already discussed, that for men writing is both a shared and a public activity. The closed room, domain of the woman writer, seems to symbolize both prison and sanctuary for, while underlining the restrictions and limitations placed on female authors, it also offers the sixteenth-century woman a means of self-expression otherwise denied to her.

Catherine d'Amboise's retreat into the privacy of her room may serve as an indication of the overall nature of her writing in the *Devotes Epistres*. Twice in her letter to Christ, the author specifically emphasizes that what she is writing is intended to be read by Him alone:

... une garde angelique  
Qui est celuy qui l'epistre presente  
Devant ton throsne. A toy seul la presente  
(p.xxii).

A toy Ihesus, non a aultre le livre (p.xxviii).

Such words point to the profoundly private character of the *Devotes Epistres*, where the constant *moy/toy* dichotomy leaves little place for a third-party. The very choice of the letter-genre is significant, implying, as it does, the presence of only two people, a sender and a receiver. Thus, as in Marguerite de Navarre's *Le Miroir*, the reader is forced into the rather uncomfortable role of eavesdropper, guiltily perusing correspondence which was not intended for his own eyes. Such privacy is the cause of a claustrophobic atmosphere which pervades the whole of the *Devotes Epistres*. Enclosed in her secret place of prayer, Catherine cuts off all links with the outside world in order to focus her attention on Christ and herself. Apart from the one reference to the author's home at Lypières, the text seems suspended from the reality of sixteenth-century life, containing no other mention of any place, person or event. The '*moy*' of the *Devotes Epistres*, that is to say, the writer of the letters to both Christ and the Virgin Mary, is quite clearly presented as Catherine d'Amboise. Her signature may be found at the end of each letter (see p.xli, p.xlvii and p.lx), including the first, where a direct association between author and letter writer is established:

C'est la main non d'aultre que de celle  
Qui se maintient estre ta povre ancelle  
KATHERINE D'AMBOYSE (p.xxx).

Likewise, at the very opening of the *Livre des Prudens*, the narrator announces '*moy Katherine d'Amboise*' (f.1 ro), revealing author and narrator to be one and the same. This

close relationship between the writer and the speaker in the narrative, seen so many times in women's writing, is just one manifestation of the overall personal and introspective nature of the majority of feminine texts. Centring her narrative around herself, Catherine depicts a somewhat egocentric vision of a world of reduced proportions in which everything rotates around her own being:

Le clair soleil, lequel marche tousjours,  
Pour mesurer et compasser mes jours (p.xxi).

Oultre as créés les quatres elemens,  
Pour me donner vie et nourrissemens  
(p.xxii).

Ridden with guilt, the author's imagination transforms this narrow world-view into a nightmarish vision where all creation seeks to chastise her for her misdemeanours:

Ne doy-je point estre de tous blasmée?  
Ne doyvent point les astres et les cieulx  
Me foudroyer en lacrimables lieux?  
Helas! pourquoy me nourris-tu la terre?  
(p.xxvi).

At other times, Catherine is full of wonder, marvelling at her own existence in the world:

M'avez formé tant l'ame que le corp  
Par amoureux et gracieulx accords,  
Sans que besoing vous eussies de me faire  
Et que de moy n'eussies aucune affaire  
(pp. xx-xxi).

Aware of the gratitude she owes to her creator, yet recognizing her failure to respond to his love, Catherine is plunged into the deepest despair. Taking up the traditional marriage metaphor, this failure is depicted in terms of the breaking of a betrothal; the sin being all the more heinous, for the abandoned lover is more perfect than any terrestrial contender. Consequently, Catherine's letter to Christ is both self-accusatory and contrite, as the wanton wife promises to return to her marital duties:

Recongnissant ma fault et mon offence,  
Ou il n'y a replicque ny deffence;  
Ou envers toy je me puisse excuser;  
Mais au contraire il me fault accuser.  
Ce que je fais par ceste epistre et lectre,  
Te pourmectant de jamais ne commectre,  
Mon seul Seigneur, et amy tres loyal;  
Mais t'obeyr comme ta chaste espouse  
(p.xxviii).

In the final letter of the *Devotes Epistres*, the author, assuming a masculine voice, sets out the response of Christ himself. Seeking to speak as a male as well as a divine being, Catherine portrays the figure of Christ in the role of a dominant husband, forgiving, but also chiding his disobedient wife:

Tu as suyvy leur infamie et bende  
 Par moult de temps, dont tu devoys la mende  
 A moy ton Dieu, qui t'eus voullu contraindre  
 Faire payement sans espargner ou faindre,  
 Qu'eusses tu faict, povrette creature?  
 Ton corps et ame alloit a l'aventure  
 Contemple donc la charité profonde  
 De ton amy, le bien en luy abonde  
 (pp.lv-lvi).

It is interesting to note that in spite of their differing religious convictions, both Marguerite de Navarre and Catherine d'Amboise have recourse to the same image of the submissively chaste wife as an expression of their religious sentiment. In each case, the metaphor of the Soul as bride, while providing a convenient model for the woman writer to adopt at the same time, proves to reinforce the traditional male ideal of the perfect woman.

A rhetoric of place permeates the whole of the *Devotes Epistres*, symbolizing the state of both sin and redemption. Catherine's fall into sin is represented by movement from a 'lieu plaisant' to a hellish world of despair described as 'lacrимables lieux', inhabited by 'bestes devorables'. Throughout her work, the author sustains this dual vision, highlighting the contrast between the world of the sinner ('lieu scabraire', 'Gouffre infernal') and that of the penitent ('lieu celie', 'palais royaulx', 'beaulx manoirs et chasteaux', 'haultz lieux cristalins'). On a different level, a contrast also emerges between the confined space of the 'lieu segrect', Catherine's meeting place with Christ ('... où souvent oraison/ Te présenta Katherine d'Amboyse', p.xxx) and the more spacious, less claustrophobic palaces, manor-houses and castles of heaven where the author will no longer need to withdraw in order to converse with God. This spacial polarity reflects Catherine's own extremes of emotion; her mood swinging from despair to joy during the course of the *Devotes Epistres*. The work begins on a note of intense gloom, as the author finds herself turned away from the paradisiac realm: '... je fus dejectée/ Du lieu plaisant où fut ma demourée' (p.xxiii). As is confirmed later in her letter, the 'lieu plaisant' from which Catherine is dismissed turns out, in fact, to be the garden of Eden:

Las! c'est peché, cestuy la proprement,  
 Qui me trompa dès le commencement...  
 Par quoy je fus par l'ange separée,  
 Et rejeitée ès paradis terrestre  
 (pp.xxvi-vii).

Developing this parallel, Catherine presents herself not just as a daughter of Eve, but actually as Eve herself, the archetypal sinner: 'Pour le parler du faulx serpent lezart,/ Je t'oubliés...' (p.xxiii). Cast into the 'gouffre infernal', the author's corrupt soul is mirrored by her physical deterioration. In a rather frightening portrait, reminiscent of passages from the Old Testament, sin is presented as an open wound ('ceste playe', p.xxiv) or a disease, visible to the human eye which looks on in horror:

Je devins lors, par ort peché, lepreuse,  
 Hideuse a veoir en face, tres horrible  
 Plus que nulle autre infaicte et corruptible  
 (p.xxiii).

... ma chair enclavée/ D'infection (p.xxv).

As self-deprecating as the narrator in *Le Miroir*, Catherine analyses her sinful state with remarkable frankness, claiming to have erred in every possible way:

Pour abreger, aucun je n'en excepte,  
 Comme imprudente, à tout mal faire experte  
 (p.xxxiv).

Indeed, although it is necessary to be cautious in calling a literary text sincere, the *Devotes Epistres* certainly has every appearance of inviting such a definition. The repetition of verbs such as 'raconter', 'narrer' and 'reciter' reveal the author's desire to unmask herself entirely, concealing nothing from Christ:

Ay entrepris mon cas raconter,  
 Tous mes forfaitz sans ung en accepter  
 (p.xxxiii).

Adopting a suitable attitude of humility for this confession, throughout her first letter Catherine constantly seeks to denigrate and belittle herself:

Ta povre serve, indigne creature (p.xix).  
 O doulx Ihesus, tu fus si amyable  
 De moy, meschante et si tres pitoyable  
 (p.xxiv).

A mood of pessimism dominates all this section of the *Devotes Epistres*, characterized by a recurrent tear-motif:

... je larmoye et soppire (p.xxxiv).

... par longtemps ay ploré ma douleur (p.xxiii).



In the very first lines of her work, Catherine declares the letter itself to be composed of her own tears:

... ceste epistre construite en douleurs,  
Pleine d'ennuy, gemissemens, et pleurs (p.xix).

As the author's mood gradually sways from despair to hope during the course of her letter to the Virgin Mary, these tears of sorrow turn into tears of joy:

Non une goutte de joye ne respendent  
Mes povres yeulx, ung millier en descendent  
Tant nuyct que jour; prevoyant ce grant bien  
(p.xxxviii).

Catherine's joy in anticipation of Christ's reply becomes so overwhelming that she can hardly refrain from bursting into song. Realizing that the singing of a popular secular song would be irreverent, the author turns her mind to a more appropriate expression of joy:

Non de gayté mondaine qui chancelle  
Ne chanteroy; mais de spirituelle  
(p.xxxix).

As will be seen below, this hymn takes the form of a *Chant Royal*, celebrating the virtues of the Virgin Mary. The author's transition from a negative to a positive state of mind is characterized by a corresponding change in her physiognomy, her 'triste visage' being replaced by a 'gaillard maintient'. Thus, like *Le Miroir* which begins with a crisis that is resolved by means of a confessional mode of speaking/writing, the text of the *Devotes Epistres* becomes a necessary tool for achieving spiritual improvement and peace of mind. The act of literary composition is, therefore, an essential factor in Catherine's religious experience, providing her with a means by which to converse with Christ and resolve her own inner conflict.

#### A Literary Present

In her letter to the Virgin Mary, Catherine refers to her text as a gift, a symbol of her heart which she has laid open:

La partye noble, de mon corps la meilleur,  
Je la t'envoye: c'est mon doloireux cuer,  
Duquel feras, s'il te plaist, ung present  
A ton cher filz (p.xxxvi).

For the Virgin Mary, a separate gift is sent in the form of the *Chant Royal*, composed as a symbol of the author's love:

Et pour vray signe d'amour et souvenance  
Je t'envoye ung petit chant royal (p.xl).

Catherine's notion of writing as a gift is unusual for a woman writer.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, while painting a somewhat self-effacing portrait of herself, the author does not, like many female writers, belittle her own composition. On the contrary, turning the traditional modesty topos to her own ends, Catherine sets out a defence of the well-intentioned writer in which she declares that literary merit should be judged less on erudition than on supreme effort. Catherine puts forward a concept of writing which would permit male and female writers to compete on equal terms:

Si je ne touche de toy si haultement,  
Qu'il t'appartient, excuse ta servante.  
À ceste affaire trop plus qu'insuffisante.  
Les saints docteurs et orateurs ensemble  
Mesmes les cieulx ne sauroient, ce me semble,  
Toy hault louer à tant que peust suffire.  
Cela je sçay, mais j'ay tousjours ouy dire:  
Celuy qui faict son povoir, au surplus  
De louenge ne doit estre forclus  
Mais exalté en public de chacun,  
Sans desdaigner, c'est proverbe commun  
(pp.xl-xli).

A contradiction immediately comes to light between the author's desire for public recognition of her literary endeavours ('exalté en public') and her own distinctly private text composed in a 'lieu segrect'. However, Catherine's use of the verb 'devoir' ('ne *doit* estre forclus') suggests her awareness of this gap separating what she believes should be the reception of a female text from what she knows to be the actual reality of the society in which she lives. As in the *Devotes Epistres*, Catherine's use of the modesty topos in *Le Livre des Prudens et Imprudens* is far from straightforward. While excusing her work as a feeble attempt by a woman writer, she points out that her lack of erudition is no fault of her own:

C'est euvre de femme qui donne raison peremptoire  
d'excusacion plus ample que d'un homme qui a liberté aller sa  
et là auxz universitez et estudez où il peult comprendre toustes  
sciences par sollicitude qui n'est l'estat du sexe femynin (f.6 vo).

Such words are carefully chosen for, while outwardly appearing to submit to the tradition of feminine modesty, Catherine is able to veil criticism of the restrictive programme of education open to the sixteenth-century woman. At the end of the *Livre des Prudens*, the modesty topos reappears in the form of a somewhat aggressive challenge to potential critics of her work (similar use of the modesty topos is made by Catherine des Roches, see Chapter 4, Section 3):

Et si aulcune chose y est inserée qui à aulcuns desplaise, à luy  
sera de la corriger car trop ignorer et peu sçauoir souventesfoys  
sont cause de mon erreur (f.136 ro).

Catherine's choice of the epistolary form for her work might be interpreted as a deliberate move towards a more literary world than that chosen by a writer such as Gabrielle de Bourbon. The literary letter was a particularly popular genre among male writers in the early sixteenth century (see, for example, Clément Marot's *Epîtres* or Ovid's *Heroides* which were widely known at this period) and was also the most common elementary form of composition for school boys. We might, therefore, conclude that Catherine is, in her *Devotes Epistres*, deliberately adopting a mode of writing which may allow her to compete on equal terms with men.

The *Chant Royal*, the author's present to the Virgin Mary, is a joyous song, bursting with vitality. The rather subdued tone of her first guilt-ridden letter vanishes completely, as Catherine, inspired by divine love, seems suddenly blessed with the gift of eloquence. In contrast to her first letter, the *Chant Royal* is full of erudite references, revealing the author to be particularly articulate. The tempo of this section gains a sense of urgency as Catherine calls out with the repeated cry of 'viens', inviting all to join her song:

Viens, Aurora, par lucidations  
En precursant les beaux jours matutins;  
Viens, Orpheus, sonner harpe et clarins.  
Viens, Amphion, de la belle contrée  
Viens, Royne Hester, préparée de joyaulx  
(p.xlv).

In her exuberance, the author indiscriminately mingles biblical and mythological characters in a breathless list of names including angels, archangels, cherubins, seraphins, Judith, Rachel, Esther, Orpheus, muses, Apollo, nymphs and so forth. Wishing to orchestrate the *Chant Royal*, Catherine calls on the various characters to bring with them a variety of musical instruments ('harpe', 'clarins', 'violes', 'tambours' and 'chalumeaux'). We have now come a long way from the 'gemissemens et pleurs' dominating the early parts of the *Devotes Epistres*. The joyous atmosphere of the *Chant Royal* pervades the whole of this section, even on a linguistic level where constant alliteration accompanied by a brisk rhythm create a song-like impression:

Doulz zephirs, par sibillacions  
Sepmés partout roses et roumarins  
(p.xlvi).

It is on this note of triumph that Catherine's guardian angel returns, bearing the symbol of reconciliation, the ring of betrothal:

O mon bon Ange, tu soys le bienvenu.  
J'aperçois bien, voyant le contenu,  
Par cest anneau, de quoy present me fais,  
Que de peché ne porte plus le fès  
(p.xlvii).

Catherine's marriage seems to beg a parallel with another divine betrothal which was most certainly known to the author, that of St Catherine. In St Catherine's vision of her heavenly marriage with Christ, she too is presented with a ring.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it would seem that the author is deliberately playing on parallels with her own namesake. The structure of the *Devotes Epistres* has been described as cyclic, a symbol of the ring given to Catherine by Christ: '... une structure cyclique, elle-même métaphorique, tout comme l'anneau de paix et de rémission'.<sup>31</sup> The *Devotes Epistres* certainly has an unlimited feel to it, for there is no reason to suggest why the cycle of sin, repentance and remission should not begin again at the end of the seventh letter. Moreover, Catherine's first letter hints that such a cycle has already occurred outside the limits of the text (pp.xxiii-iv). This absence of a precise beginning or a conclusive ending is, as has already been seen, a common feature of the feminine textual body.

## 4. Marie Dentière

In her journal recounting the religious unrest in Geneva between 1526 and 1535, Jeanne de Jussie, a member of the order of the poor Clares, records the infiltration of her convent by a group of evangelical preachers. Among this group, whose purpose lay in persuading the nuns to renounce their solemn vows and abandon the order, Jussie informs us in particular of the presence of a woman reformer, named Marie Dentière. Full of hostility for this unwelcome intruder, Jeanne de Jussie paints a portrait of Marie Dentière which is far from flattering:

En celle compagnie estoit une Moine Abbessse fausse, ridee, et langue diabolique, ayant mary et enfans, nommee Marie d'Entiere, de Picardie, qui se mesloit de prescher et de pervertir les gens de devotion.<sup>32</sup>

She then proceeds to describe the encounter in detail, transcribing word for word the rather virulent tirade delivered to the nuns by Marie Dentière herself:

Hé pauvres creatures! Si vous sçaviez qu'il fait bon estre aupres d'un ioly mary, et comment Dieu l'a aggreable; l'ay longtemps esté en ces tenebres et hypocrisie où vous estes, mais le seul Dieu m'a faict cognoistre l'abusion de ma chétive vie, et suis parvenue à la vraye lumiere de verité. Considerant que ie vivois en regret, car en ces religions n'y a que cagoterie, corruption mentale, et oysiveté, et pource sans differer ie prins du thresor de l'Abbaye iusques à cinq cens ducats, et me suis retirée de ce malheur, et graces au seul Dieu, i'ay desia cinq beaux enfans et vis salutairement (Jussie, pp.173-74).<sup>33</sup>

Dentière's colourful speech to the Sisters of St Clare brings to light a number of themes which, as will be seen later in this section, will have a prominent place in her own writing. Jeanne de Jussie's report of the visit of Dentière and other female reformers to her convent provides convincing evidence to suggest that during the early stages of the Reformation in Geneva, some women were, in fact, preaching in public gatherings. This idea is confirmed by the work of Marie Dentière's husband, Anthoine Fromment who, an evangelical reformer himself, also composed an account of the events of the Genevan Reformation movement. His work, entitled *Les Actes et Gestes Merveilleux de la Cité de Genève*, devotes a whole chapter to the narration of a young woman's conversion to the evangelical faith: 'La Conversion d'une bourgoyse de Geneve, qui resistoit grandement à l'Evangille au commencement' (Chapter III).<sup>34</sup> Having attended the sermon of one of the male reformers, the woman, Claudine Levet, returns home in order to spend three days reading a New Testament borrowed from the preacher. Such reading proves to be revelatory to the young woman, whose conversion is the

direct result of her discovery of biblical truth. Vernacular translations of the Bible were certainly circulating before the Reformation. However, most of these were only abridged versions or, even, a selection of extracts accompanied by appropriate illustrations. In contrast, Fromment's account depicts the unusual situation whereby a woman is encouraged to set about an unsupervised, private reading of a complete text of the New Testament. Fromment's description of Claudine reveals that she was actively involved in interpreting and preaching Scripture, not just to those within her household, but also, it would appear, to much larger public assemblies of mixed sex:

Tous ceulx de la ville en estoient estonnez, de la voir si tost changée et de l'ouyr ainsi parler comme elle faysoit, disputant contre les Prebstres, leur remonstrant benignement, par les Escriptions ce qui estoit nécessaire, et partout ou elle se trouvoit ça et là parmy la ville, faysoit le semblable (Fromment, p.17).<sup>35</sup>

Throughout this episode, Fromment persistently draws our attention to the most noticeable outward sign of Claudine's recent conversion, that is, her sudden gift of eloquence: 'ses compaignes... l'ouyrent parler aultrement qu'elle ne souloit' (p.17). Claudine's conversion may also be viewed as a rejection of the traditional feminine role, for her espousal of the evangelical faith is accompanied by a corresponding refusal to adopt the typical adornments of womanhood: '... laissant toutes ses pompes, mettant à bas ses beaux ornements, ses doreures et paremens' (Fromment, p.18).

The chronicles of both Jussie and Fromment focus on the pre-Reformation period in Geneva, prior to Calvin's arrival in July 1536. During this period, the authority of both the Bishop and the Duke of Savoy was overruled, leaving Geneva with an independent status of self-government. On a passing visit to Geneva at this time, Calvin, responding to the pleas of the reformer Guillaume Farel, remained in the city to assist in the organization of the new faith. Calvin's stay was only to be a brief one for, in April 1538, following the rejection by the citizens of Geneva of, amongst other doctrines, his discipline of ex-communication, both Calvin and Farel were banished from the city. Calvin spent a few years as minister in Strasbourg, returning to Geneva only in 1541. It seems likely that Calvin would have been aware that women were actively involved in the Genevan Reformation before his arrival. Attributing this unusual freedom to a temporary situation where there was little ecclesiastical organization, he does not, as such, condemn the women who participated in the evangelical movement. However, as the Reformation consolidated its power, Calvin seems to have expected women to return to their traditional subordinate roles within the household:

The women lost out to the tightening up of institutions as the Reformation was firmly established. Special roles for women were permissible during an 'emergency' situation but no longer tolerated when the new order was instituted.<sup>36</sup>

It was, no doubt, the uncharacteristically unfeminine behaviour of women such as Claudine Levet which would later, after his return from exile, provoke Calvin to reinforce the notion of sexual difference by redefining gender roles:

Now therefore let us note well what St Paul tells us here. For women have been allowed for a long time to become increasingly audacious, and besides, speech apart, there are also very provocative clothes, so that it is very hard to discern whether they are men or women.<sup>37</sup>

Calvin was certainly not a spokesman for the cause of women's liberation. His views on women, little different from those found in courtesy literature, tend to be traditional, placing the female sex in a position of natural subjection to men.<sup>38</sup> In his sermon on I Timothy 2:12 ('I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep quiet'), Calvin leads woman safely back into the confines of her home, reminding her that any talents for teaching may be used only in private:

Paul is not taking from women their duty to instruct their family, but is only excluding them from the office of teaching (*a munere docendi*), which God has committed exclusively to men.... The reason that women are prevented from teaching is that it is not compatible with their status, which is to be subject to men, whereas to teach implies superior authority and status.... Thus for a woman to usurp the right to teach would be a sort of mingling of earth and heaven.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, it would seem that for a woman such as Marie Dentièrre, the right to preach or speak in public during the pre-Reformation period was no more than a taste of the freedom of speech enjoyed by male contemporaries. This freedom, deemed as unacceptable, was quickly curtailed by Calvin, thereby suggesting why Dentièrre's own work, *La Guerre et deslivrance de la ville de Genesve*, is the only known evangelical testimony by a woman writer to have been published in Geneva during this period.<sup>40</sup>

#### A Masculine Mask

Choosing to conceal both her identity and sex, Marie Dentièrre deliberately published her rendering of the Genevan Reformation under a male authorship: 'La Guerre et Deslivrance de la ville de Genesve fidèlement faicte et composée par ung Marchant demourant en icelle' (p.337). It has been suggested that the work was written in order to serve as propaganda for the election, in May 1536, which led to the establishment of Geneva as a Protestant city-state.<sup>41</sup> As will be seen throughout this section, the tone and spirit of *La Guerre* certainly support this hypothesis. Remembering that the electorate would have been

exclusively male, it is perhaps of no great surprise to find Marie Dentièrè presenting herself in the guise of a man. Conscious that her reading public will be, for the majority, male, Dentièrè adopts the technique of convergence, accomodating her own style to match that of her readers. In other words, Dentièrè seeks to emulate the voice of a male writer, imitating what she considers to be a masculine way of writing. Wishing to write a work as controversial as *La Guerre*, Dentièrè has, in fact, no choice but to act in this way. A text of this kind, signed with a woman's name, would certainly stand little chance of eliciting approval from a male readership. The very fact that such writing would not be condoned by either the church or society in general, indicates the somewhat superficial character of the freedom of speech accorded to female reformers at this time in Geneva. Thus, in order to ensure that her voice will be listened to, Dentièrè must carefully dissimulate her female identity. In her book entitled *The Writing or the Sex?*, the feminist critic, Dale Spender, comments on the difficulties experienced by women when talking with members of the opposite sex:

Women who want to contribute equally with men in conversation have to be committed and courageous. A veritable battery of insults is available to intimidate them, to undermine their confidence and ensure their withdrawal.<sup>42</sup>

Spender's words seem to suggest why so many sixteenth-century women writers opt out of a mixed-sex discourse, preferring to address an all-female audience. By taking on the identity of a man, Dentièrè escapes the onslaught of male critics seeking to undermine her work with any such 'battery of insults'. However, at the same time, the price she pays for gaining the freedom to express her theological ideas is to find herself forced to sacrifice her own personal voice. As it happens, Marie Dentièrè seems to adapt to her new conversational role with remarkable ease. Not only does she dare to speak, but defying Erasmus' advice for women to lower their voices ('on lui défend de crier et de faire trop de bruit'), she speaks very loudly indeed, employing all the devices and tricks of masculine rhetoric. The success of her rhetoric may be attested by the comments of her critics:

On peut le soupçonner toutefois d'avoir été moins novice dans l'art d'écrire qu'il ne veut le faire croire.... on s'apercevra qu'il n'ignorait ni les procédés du style, ni les ressources de la rhétorique et qu'il les emploie les uns et les autres avec assez de succès.<sup>43</sup>

Dentièrè emerged as a fine rhetorician, preaching a sermon brimming with both biblical and popular allusions.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, Dentièrè's masculine mask seems to have baffled critics for many years, meaning that *La Guerre* was not attributed to her until the end of the nineteenth century.

*La Guerre et deslivrance* is headed with the very appropriate device 'Lisez et puis jugés'. This choice of motto immediately alerts the reader to the public nature of the text,



implying that the audience will be called on to play an essential role in the work. Dentièrre's motto also serves as an indication of the sort of role required of the reader, that is, an active one. The exhortative command, 'jugés', ensures that the reader, denied of the possibility of an indifferent or neutral response, will be in no doubt as to the manner in which *La Guerre* is to be read. Thus, from the very beginning of the work, the reader is informed that he is about to embark on a text of a highly polemical nature; a genre which is generally considered to be a particularly masculine form of expression. Momentum is sustained throughout *La Guerre* by means of continual discourse with an imaginary reading public. Dentièrre's reliance on her readers highlights one of the most salient differences between her own writing and that of many of the other women writers discussed so far. As we have seen, in works such as *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* or *Les Devotes Epistres*, the authors limit the readership of their texts by introducing only one designated listener (i.e. God). In contrast, Marie Dentièrre seeks above all to gather as wide an audience as possible:

ay bien voulu rédiger et mettre par escript toutes ces choses,  
manifestes et publiques à ung chascun de la ville (p.339).

Consisting of an introduction followed by three sections of equal length, Dentièrre's tightly structured work has every appearance of being a kind of sermon. Such a genre, implying, by its nature, the presence of a group of listeners, is an essentially masculine form of writing. Additionally, in contrast to the open-ended, cyclic structure of many feminine texts, *La Guerre et deslivrance* has a well-defined beginning and end. Always aware that she is addressing a crowd, Dentièrre seeks to gain her listeners' confidence, thereby persuading them of the veracity of the evangelical cause. Wishing to unite her listeners with herself as well as with each other, the author concentrates on creating a group identity, stirring up feelings of unity by means of the strategic use of the first person plural:

Leur Dieu n'est-il pas aussi le nostre? Ouy, certes! Est-il  
moindre qu'il n'a esté? Non! (p.341).

This pattern of rhetorical question and answer, frequently found in *La Guerre*, provides an effective technique for rousing feelings of togetherness amongst a crowd. In my discussion of the *Querelle des Femmes*, I noted the recurrent use of 'nous' by writers seeking to establish a kind of male fraternity between themselves and their all-male audience; it would seem that, here, Dentièrre is imitating this technique of public speech. Also, to ensure that hostility will be kindled against the Catholics, the author sets up a nous/vous dichotomy in which the second person is adopted only for the purpose of belittling or alienating the opposing faction. By encouraging her audience to jeer at their 'enemy', Dentièrre is able to provoke a sense of superiority among her own supporters:

Que ferés-vous maintenant, pouvres prestres? J'ai pitié de vous. Vous estiés icy si gros et gras, si riches et puyssans, si bien à vostre ayse, par vos faulx miracles [Matt 24]. Mais maintenant sont véritables. Quel plus grands miracles demandés vous que ceulx qui sont au couvent de Sainte Claire? Car, sans courir à St. Jacques ne à Rome, les pouvres sont devenus chanoynes (pp. 365-66).<sup>45</sup>

Writing as a man, Dentièrre has no need to 'lower her voice'. Indeed, she does quite the opposite, enlivening her speech through repeated use of exclamations which help to convey her overwhelming enthusiasm for her cause. The vocabulary selected by the author is frequently coarse or vulgar (e.g. 'cul de terre') and certainly most uncharacteristic of the refined speech recommended for women. Never allowing her narrative to lack in vigour, Dentièrre will suddenly, every so often, punctuate her sermon with a violent, abusive diatribe:

Ho! quel Evesque! Bien convenant à ce que dict Saint Paul (I Timo 3)! Quel pasteur de brebis nous auryons trouvé, ainsy tractant et nourrissant le troupeau, les mangeant et dévorant comme loups ravissants (pp.355-56).

The first person narrative is noticeably absent from *La Guerre*, which is disappointingly impersonal for an eyewitness account. However, remembering that the use of an all-pervasive 'je' is the mark of a feminine text, we may quickly understand Dentièrre's careful avoidance of this technique. Too great a use of the first person would be unsuitable for a work of such a polemical nature and might hamper its success in parading as a piece of male rhetoric. Generally a device for unveiling and disclosing information, the first person, when used in Dentièrre's text, tends to serve the opposite purpose of concealing and masking the writer's personality. The few appearances in *La Guerre* of the first person tend to link it directly with the false author:

C'est chose impossible à ung tel marchant que moy le pouvoir ne sçavoir assés souffisamment escrire. Mais si Dieu touche le cueur à quelque bon personnage plus souffissant que moy, ayant le langaige plus féconde, les mots plus exquis [il] le declarera. Vous priant ne regarder à le stile ou à la rudesse du langaige; car le pais et le flat [l'estat] de marchandise doit faire l'excuse (p.343).

Exchanging the excuses of feminine inadequacy for those of the lack of education of the lower classes, the author has recourse to the modesty topos on only this one occasion. Already an insincere device, Dentièrre's modesty topos becomes doubly false on account of its practice by a fake persona. Unlike the case in many women writers, in Dentièrre's usage, the modesty topos would appear to be no more than a traditional rhetorical technique. This is certainly confirmed by the tone of *La Guerre* which, undermining the author's claims of

modesty, is characterized by an over-whelming sense of self-confidence and certainty. Indeed, we are now far from the doubts and hesitations of the self-effacing, apologetic female author. A brief comparison with the works of both Fromment and Jeanne de Jussie highlights the lack of personal focus in *La Guerre et deslivrance*. Both Fromment and Jussie recount events from a view point which is indicative of their own individual interest in the Reformation; the former focusing on the fate of the evangelical reformers and the latter tracing the effects of the changes in Geneva on St Clare's convent. Both works manifest a particular interest in the female response to religious unrest. In spite of Dentièr's role as a female reformer, she carefully avoids any sort of allusion to her own activities or the reactions of women in general, leaving no room for any chance identification of herself. Thus, the author remains firmly in the background, effacing her own personality from the text. Feigning complete lack of interest in the participation of women in the evangelical cause, Dentièr peoples her text with an almost totally male cast. As a consequence, male prototypes, with which the readers may easily identify, are frequently chosen to serve as biblical parallels of the Genevan situation:

Et pourtant, fault que ce grand Gollias, fier, haultein et orgueilleux, bien armé et équipé, soit abbatu, ruyné et destruit, tué et mis à mort de son propre custeau [couteau] par ce petit David doux et béning. Que dirons-nous doncques maintenant de sa force, de sa puissance si tost abbatue? Qu'il a trouvé plus fort et puyssant que luy. La multitude, la prudence, la force, ne faict icy la victoyre, mais la seule foy et pleine assurance qu'on ha à Dieu (p.341).

Like any public orator, Marie Dentièr is acutely conscious of the verbal surface of her sermon. The style of *La Guerre* is, therefore, highly elaborate and polished, each phrase being carefully weighed to have the greatest impact on the listener. While favouring long sentences, Dentièr constructs her work with perfect balance, ensuring that she will not be accused of feminine verbosity:

Notre bon Dieu, ayant pitié de son pouvre peuple, le voyant ainsi pillé, mangé, vexé et tourmenté, l'a voulu deslivrer du temps de toutes tyrannies, du temps qu'on n'y pensoit pas, et du temps mesme que les traytres avoyent le gouvernement de la chose publique (pp.348-49).

The representation of the evangelicals as a people favoured by God recurs throughout *La Guerre*, lending authority to the author's own ideas. The frequent use of antithesis also provides an effective means of controlling the narrative, imprinting the author's message on the reader's mind:

Leur malédictions ont esté bénédiction, excommuniements  
absolutions, povretés richesses, misères consolations, traysons  
asseurances, pleurs joye (p.361).

*La Guerre* is set in a biblical framework; references to Scripture being cited continually. These references help to give greater sway to the author's arguments, supporting her own words with those of unquestionable authority. This framework also succeeds in depersonalizing Dentièr's text, for the immediacy of the eye-witness account is lost behind a cloak of biblical paraphrase. During the course of *La Guerre*, we witness the author repeatedly putting forward biblical passages as evidence for the acceptance of evangelical doctrines; in this way, the Bible comes to serve principally as a proof text. A prophetic tone pervades Dentièr's depiction of the evangelical struggles where each event of the Genevan Reformation is presented as an inevitable occurrence, foretold in the Scriptures. One such example of the author's use of prophetic interpretation is her reference to the persecution of the evangelicals by means of a famine sent by the enemies. By turning to Jeanne de Jussie's more pedestrian account, we may find an explanation for Dentièr's obscure words:

L'an 1527 Monseigneur fit défendre soubs grosse peine à tous  
ses subjects que nul n'eust à porter aucuns vivres en la cité de  
Genève (Jussie, p.2).

Playing on the very wording of her title, Dentièr sets up, throughout her text, an extended parallel between the 'deliverance' of her evangelical companions and the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt. Carried away by her enthusiasm for the evangelical cause, the author claims the more recent deliverance to be more outstanding than its biblical counterpart:

Voyez-vous bien quelle délivrance est cecy, quelle grâce,  
quelle miséricorde leur est faite! Mais elle nous est faite plus  
grande.... Car pour ung ennemy que ceulx-cy eussent, nous en  
avions deux; pour une tyrannie et cruauté, nous en avons  
mille; pour ung Pharaon, cent; pour une malice, envye, et  
obstination, cent mille (p.342).

Eager for her sermon to have dramatic impact, Dentièr frequently employs the device of exaggeration and, at times, falls into an epic style of writing:

Nonobstant qu'ils fussent lassés et travaillés, tant du chemin  
que faulte du manger, par trois fois repoulsarent leurs ennemys  
avec grande effusion de sang. Des ennemys en demoura sus le  
champ plus de quatre cents et des aultres de Neufchastel sept  
hommes et deux blessés (p.370).

The elevated style of epic was no doubt considered to belong to an exclusively masculine domain for, as we have already seen in Chapter 4, both Hélisenne de Crenne and Jeanne

Flore revert to this technique when writing as a man (Guenelic), or when writing for a male audience (*Compte* 6). Another particularly masculine device is that of sarcasm, rarely found in works by women authors, but favoured again and again by Dentièrre herself. Indeed, in *La Guerre*, sarcasm is used with the specific aim of provoking sneers and mockery from her audience:

Ces vénérables brigans, ne pouvant venir à leur désir, ont voullu reculler pour mieulx saulter, mais en sautant sont tombés à renverse (p.361).

Auquel temps vint aussy, pour prescher et maintenir la loy papalle, un docteur de Paris, nommé Furbity, le très bien receu de nos vénérables tondus, selon son ventre (p.352).

Sarcasm is, of course, a form of humour and an effective means of creating a feeling of solidarity between those sharing in the laughter. Another method of provoking laughter, found in *La Guerre*, is the use of the pun. In one section of her work, Dentièrre cleverly sets up an extended pun, dependent upon the double meaning of 'duc' as duke (of Savoy, in this case) and horned owl. The joke also plays on the possibility of interpreting 'plusmé' as both plucked or robbed, as well as including a homonymic pun based on 'elles' and 'ailes':

Mais ce Duc, voyant bien qu'il perdroit ses plusmes, comme il a faict ses [ces] derniers jours, a tout faict et machiné deçà et delà.... La crainte ne luy a pas esté sans dommaige, car ung chescun luy a tiré une plume, et est plusmé tout nud et est sans plusmes. Aussy est bien rayson que celuy qui veult plusmer et est plusmé, qui [qu'il] soit sans elles.... Femmes boutés hardimment poussins couver, car les ducs ne les mangeront plus (p.346).<sup>46</sup>

The phrase 'comme il a faict ces derniers jours', alluding to the confiscation of the province of Savoy by Francis I, highlights the fact that *La Guerre* was directed to a specific contemporary audience who would have been well aware of recent events. Such references seem to confirm the hypothesis that *La Guerre* was composed as election propaganda; the author having little concern for any future readers who may experience difficulty in understanding popular allusions of this kind. Moreover, by alluding to events which may be comprehended only by an enlightened audience, Dentièrre seems, yet again, to be aiming at creating a bond between listeners who share together the satisfaction of being 'in the know'.

### Dropping the Mask

In 1539, Marie Dentièrre composed an *Epistre très utile*, addressed to Marguerite de Navarre. The work is divided into three distinct parts, consisting of a *Lettre d'envoi*, a

*Défense pour les femmes* and the *Epistre* proper.<sup>47</sup> At the time the *Epistre* was written, Geneva was in a state of turmoil, rival Protestant factions being rife in the city. Dentièrre's letter describes this fragmentation of Protestantism, indicating the general confusion over the particular programme of reform to be followed:

Les hommes, certes, sont en grande division à présent, en sorte que les uns disent cecy, les autres cela, tellement que le paovre peuple ne sçait de quelle part se retourner (p.383).

Following a request by Marguerite de Navarre, Dentièrre devotes the greater part of her letter to discussion of the position of the exiled reformers.<sup>48</sup> Asserting her support for the exiled Farel and Calvin, the author places Luther's name alongside that of the Turks and pagans: 'contre les Turcz, Juifz, Infideles, Faulx Chrestiens, Anabaptistes et Lutheriens'. The title of the *Epistre très utile* immediately reveals Dentièrre's rejection of the masculine voice she adopted throughout *La Guerre et deslivrance*:

Epistre très utile, faicte et composée par une femme chrestienne de Tournay, envoyée à la Roynne de Navarre, seur du Roy de France (p.377).

Although Dentièrre does not actually reveal her full name, she does go so far as to sign her initials:

A tres chrestienne princesse, Marguerite de France... M.D.  
desire salut et augmentation de grace par Jesus-Christ (p.377).

By dropping her male identity, the author is able to reclaim a feminine voice of her own. Indeed, no more than a brief study of the *Epistre* underlines the totally different approach separating the later work from *La Guerre et deslivrance*; this difference being directly attributable to Dentièrre's 'ambidextrous' ability to write as both a man and a woman.

In her *Epistre très utile*, Dentièrre refers to women's exclusion from public speech. However, instead of attempting to enter the forbidden domain by deceiving her audience (in the guise of a man), she now recommends a new course of action which will not involve competing with men on their own terms:

Et combien que [ne] soit permiz de prescher ès assemblées et églises publiques, ce néantmoins n'est deffendu d'escrire et admonester l'une l'autre, en toute charité (Herminjard, p.297).

Banned from the mixed-sex conversation, the author now turns her attention to a much more limited audience, from whom she might expect to elicit sympathy and approval. The decision to make use of the letter-genre stands as a clear sign that this work will be of a more intimate nature than *La Guerre* with its overtly public overtones. Being a writer, a supporter of

evangelical ideas and, of course, a woman, Marguerite de Navarre is an ideal correspondent for Marie Dentièrre. Such shared interests ensure that writer and reader will be drawn into a close rapport, bonded together by mutual understanding. Dentièrre acknowledges Marguerite's role as writer in the very first lines of her letter:

Tout ainsi, ma très-honorée Dame, que les vrays amateurs de vérité desirent sçavoir et entendre comment ilz doibvent vivre à ce temps si dangereux, aussi nous femmes, debvons sçavoir fuyr et éviter toutes erreurs, hérésies et faulses doctrines... comme desjà assez par voz escriptz est démontré (Herminjard, p.295).<sup>49</sup>

Thus, an intriguing situation arises whereby Dentièrre and Marguerite are presented as writers and, at the same time, readers of each other's works. Political motives also seem to play an important role in the *Epistre*. Conscious of Marguerite's influential role as the sister of Francis I, Dentièrre takes advantage of this situation in order to request her correspondent to act as intermediary between herself and the king<sup>50</sup>:

Ma très-honorée Dame, vous ay bien voulu escrire, non pas pour vous enseigner, mais affin que puissiés prendre peine, envers le Roy vostre frère, pour obvier à toutes ces divisions, qui sont régnantes ès lieux, places et peuples sur lesquelz Dieu l'a commis pour régir et gouverner (Herminjard, p.297).

Extending her reading public beyond Marguerite herself, Dentièrre next announces her desire for her letter to be read by a wider female circle. Her words indicate a belief in the need for female solidarity as a means of overcoming male hostility. Dentièrre expresses hope that her letter will give courage to women enduring similar restrictions to those she has borne herself. Indeed, in her eyes, the exclusion of women from the theological sphere may be equated with a form of physical imprisonment:

Non seulement pour vous, ma dame, ay voulu escrire ceste Epistre mais aussi pour donner courage aux aultres femmes détenues en captivité (Herminjard, pp.297-98).

Elsewhere, Dentièrre has recourse to metaphors of light and darkness as a means of conveying the subjection of women. Demanding the right for all women, even those of little education, to have the possibility of reading the Bible, Dentièrre calls for a new, more respectful attitude towards the female sex. Her choice of the word 'femmelettes' to describe unlearned women implies not scorn, but care and affection for those who are not fortunate enough to share her own literacy:

Et principalement pour les paouvres femmelettes, desirans sçavoir et entendre la vérité: lesquelles ne sçavent quel chemin, quelle voye doibvent tenir. Et affin que désormais ne soyent en

elles-mesmes ainsi tormentées et affligées, ains plustost resjouyes. consolées et esmeues à suyvir la vérité, qui est l'Evangile de Jésus-Christ. Lequel jusques à présent a esté tant caché qu'on n'osoit dire mot, et sembloit que les femmes ne deussent rien lire ni entendre ès saintes lettres. Qui est la cause principale, ma Dame, que m'a esmeu à vous escrire, espérant en Dieu, que doresnavant les femmes ne seront plus tant mesprisées comme par le passé (Herminjard, p.298).

Remembering Dentièr's careful avoidance, throughout *La Guerre et deslivrance*, of all interest in the role played by women in the Reformation, we may appreciate the extent to which the *Epistre* has a new personal focus. The author's use of the first person plural as a means of uniting herself with her readers may remind us of phrases from *La Guerre* such as 'leur dieu n'est-il pas aussi le nostre?' However, now, the emphasis has shifted from 'we, the evangelicals' to 'we, the evangelical women'; the expression 'nous femmes' recurring repeatedly during the *Epistre*. Thus, the group being alienated by the author is no longer the Catholics, but men in general:

Non seulement aucuns calumnieurs et adversaires de vérité nous voudront taxer de trop grande audace et témérité, mais aussi aucuns des fidèles, disans que les femmes sont trop hardies d'escrire les unes aux aultres de la sainte escripture (p.378).

A spirit of indignation and outrage underlies the three sections of Dentièr's letter. Attacking the traditional ideal of the silent woman, the author persistently returns to the theme of the freedom of speech for women. No doubt embittered by her own experience of being compelled to adopt a masculine identity, Dentièr rails at the men who deny women the right to express themselves. Insisting that the gift of speech is a gift from God, the author implies that those who prohibit women to speak or write are working directly against God's will:

Si Dieu doncques a faict grâces à aulcunes bonnes femmes, leur révélant par saintes escriptures quelque chose sainte et bonne, ne l'oseront-elles escrire, dire, ou déclarer les unes aux aultres, pour les [par crainte de] calumnieurs de vérité? A! ce seroit trop hardiement fait les vouloir empescher, et, à nous, faict trop follement de cacher le talent que Dieu nous a donné, qui nous doint grâce de persévérer jusques à la fin. Amen! (p.380).

Dentièr's writing indicates a total refusal to conform to the feminine model recommended by courtesy literature. In terms of the Reformation, Dentièr's demands for the right to speak may be viewed as a rejection of a venerated icon, and icons are, of course, of central importance in the Catholic faith. Indeed, in *Le Levain du Calvinisme*, Jeanne de Jussie



depicts a whole series of scenes where we witness the evangelical reformers in the act of destroying icons and images in the churches and monasteries of Geneva:

toutes les Images qu'ils trouvoient tant en plate peinture, qu'eslevées en bosse, et tableaux qu'ils ne pouvoient avoir pour les brusler, ils leur crevoient les yeux avec le pointe de leurs piques et espees et crachoient contre pour les effacer et defigurer (Jussie, p.10).

Alongside such iconoclasm, the reformers gather crowds around them to preach the Word of God. In the case of Marie Dentièrre, the symbol of the shattered icon seems a particularly significant one, representing a transition from the silent feminine model to a new, less restrained, ideal. As it happens, the fact that Dentièrre was compelled to renounce her female identity, in order to be able to make this transition, reveals that the icon image of womanhood is no more than cracked by the evangelical cause in Geneva. Through her participation in the Refomation movement, Dentièrre came into contact with a source of inspiration which fired her enthusiasm to write and speak. However, she must suffer the frustration of being forbidden to express this enthusiasm, while glimpsing a form of freedom which cannot yet be her own except by means of deceit, disguise and the humility of suppressing her own individuality.

Although the cutting, provocative tone of *La Guerre* is attenuated in the *Epistre*, Dentièrre does retain some of the stylistic devices employed in the earlier work. For instance, the effective question/answer pattern may now be used to obtain an emotional response from her *female* readers:

Je demande fauldroit-il condamner Ruth, pourtant qu'elle est du sexe féminin, à cause que l'hystoire d'icelle est escripte en son livre? Je ne le pense pas (p.379).

The section of Dentièrre's letter entitled *Défense pour les femmes* has a surprisingly déjà vu feel to it. In fact, the author seems to be doing little more than rehashing the commonplace arguments of pro-female tracts of the *Querelle des Femmes*. Supporting her cause with a conventional list of commendable biblical women (including Sarah, Rebecca, Deborah, Ruth, Elizabeth and Mary Magdalene), Dentièrre praises qualities in them such as 'leurs bonnes meurs, gestes, maintien, exemples... foy et doctrine (p.379). The author's use of rhetorical commonplaces to support her defence of women is, in some ways, disappointing. In spite of her deliberate rejection of a masculine voice, we see that she is unable to prevent herself from becoming ensnared in a game which she is able to play only by adhering to rules made by men. On the other hand, to write against such commonplaces would entail uprooting deep-seated structures of thought; a project which could hardly be undertaken by Marie Dentièrre alone. It would be more than a little unjust to reproach Dentièrre for her participation

in a sport as manly as is the *Querelle des Femmes*. Indeed, of the women writers studied so far, Dentièrre is perhaps the most courageous of all, daring to come out from the confines of the household in order to speak with a strong, confident voice, which is quite uncharacteristic of the early sixteenth-century woman writer.

## 5. Jeanne de Jussie

## Writing for Women

Unlike *La Guerre et deslivrance*, *Le Levain du Calvinisme au commencement de l'hérésie de Genève* was almost certainly never intended for publication. However, the work was composed with a specific readership in mind, being written for circulation solely within the community of nuns of the convent of St Clare. As she writes her chronicle, Jeanne de Jussie's eyes are set on the future as well as the present. Indeed, the author states quite clearly that her work is intended to serve as consolation for any following generations of nuns who may suffer similar trials to those experienced by her own contemporaries:

Je n'escri pas la dixiesme partie: mais seulement bien peu du principal pour memoire, affin que le temps advenir ceux qui souffriront pour l'amour de Dieu en ce monde, sachent que nos predecesseurs ont souffert avant que nous, et nous apres, et tousiours de degré en degré (p.77).

Jussie's conception of writing is, therefore, as a private act, for the edification of a small, limited group of female readers. It could be said that by restricting the reading of her work to a specific female domain, Jussie is adopting the submissive, passive, conversational role expected of women. Jussie does certainly not share Marie Dentièrre's own belief in the right for women to speak in public. On the contrary, throughout *Le Levain*, the author describes the nuns' refusal to engage in discussion with the reformers who come to their convent. Silence is, without fail, the attitude with which the nuns respond to the eloquent speech of the evangelical women:

n'en voulons point ouyr parler, parce qu'il nous est deffendu: puis sans autre congé ferma la porte, et leur fit visage de bois, dont furent fort faschees (p.144).

Some of the nuns are even pictured placing plugs in their ears as a means of avoiding participation in such conversation. In contrast with the sermons of the evangelical women, the only form of expression attributed to the Catholic nuns is a series of inarticulate screams and cries:

toutes d'une voix et haut cris, vont crier misericorde sans cesser et fut tel le cry, et si espouvantable qu'il fut ouy bien loing, dont tout le couvent retonnoit (p.154).

Jeanne de Jussie's vision of the feminine behavioural model would seem, then, to correspond to the ideal prescribed by the authors of courtesy literature. However, ironically, the very fact that Jussie composes her text within a closed, all-female domain means that she is, to a certain extent, released from the normal restrictions placed on women writing in a patriarchal society. Like the coach in Marguerite de Navarre's *La Coche*, the convent, standing outside the defined areas of gendered space, symbolizes a kind of no-man's-land where feminine speech may be free and unrestrained. Thus, Jussie's withdrawal from society is ultimately responsible for according to her a greater degree of literary independence than might otherwise have been expected. Outside the ordinary sixteenth-century household, Jeanne de Jussie does not share fears of the sort observed in *Les Angoysses douloureuses*, where the feminine text constantly runs the risk of being destroyed if discovered by an oppressive husband. Not surprisingly, a reading of *Le Levain* reveals the total absence of any form of modesty topos. In my study of women's writing, Jeanne de Jussie stands out as being the only writer to omit such a convention from her work. Released from the necessity of writing within a set tradition, Jussie is exempt from participating in rhetorical games of this kind. Moreover, the author of *Le Levain*, holding complete control over the readership of her text, may be quite confident that the reception of her book will be uncritical. Far from the watchful eye of the male critic, Jussie has no need to retreat to a locked room or hiding place in order to pursue her literary endeavours. Neither does she feel under any obligation to apologize for her lack of talent, nor to strive to efface her own personality from the pages of her text.

'Moy qui ce escriis'

It would seem that Jussie's role as writer was both recognized and respected by her female companions for, in *Le Levain*, we are told that she holds the official post of 'écrivaine'. On account of her position as writing-hand for the community of nuns in general, Jussie is careful to adopt an appropriate narrative voice. Different in character from the frequently inward-looking or self-preoccupied texts of many women writers, *Le Levain* represents the voice, not of one individual, but of the whole group of St Clare Sisters. The author must, therefore, write with a multiple voice which will express the concerns of the community at large. Taking this role as 'writing-representative' seriously, the author reserves the use of the first person for identifying Jussie the 'écrivaine' rather than Jussie the nun. When discussing events in which she is directly involved, the author separates her two personas, speaking of herself in the third person:

Et ce pendant ledit mauvais Claude Bernard sermonnoit, et preschoit Soeur Jeanne de Jussie qui estoit bien grièvement malade, luy disant qu'il avoit charge par le Conseil de la ville de luy presenter, que si elle vouloit on luy donneroit party suffissant, luy en nommant plusieurs, et un tel mariage comme à la Blaisine, et que iamais la ville ne luy faudroit, et que pour autant qu'elle avoit esté leur escolliere, et estoit leur circomvoisine ils l'avoient autant chere que les filles de la ville (p.176).

Distancing herself from her narrative, Jeanne de Jussie gains credence in her objectivity and her work takes on the appearance of a reliable chronicle.<sup>51</sup> Nowhere in *Le Levain* does Jeanne de Jussie sign her name. A possible explanation for such an omission may be that her intended readers would, in fact, all know the identity of the author of the book they were reading. However, a more likely reason seems to be that Jussie did not wish to claim the work as a personal achievement, perceiving her writing as a shared act rather than her own. In spite of the missing authorial acknowledgement, the text itself provides sufficient clues to permit the unenlightened reader to identify the 'écrivaine' as Jeanne de Jussie. In one or two rare instances, the author neglects the distance she has deliberately set between her dual role as writer and character, and lapses into a purely personal account. These moments seem to occur only when the author is relating particularly emotional events, such as the personally menacing threats of the reformers:

Et moy estant du nombre fus cogneüe d'un d'iceux qui par force me vouloit descouvrir, et voir en face, et pource que ie ne luy voulus permettre se despita, disant qu'il ne feroit autre violence pour lors; mais dans peu de temps, ie vous verray (dit il) à loisir en pleine rüe, qui fut parole transpersant mon ame (p.141).

Throughout *Le Levain*, Jussie refers to her role as official writer with a degree of pride; the phrase 'moy qui ce escriis' recurring repeatedly. Drawing her readers' attention to the difficulty of her position as chronicler, Jussie frequently declares the task of forming a detailed record to be an impossible one:

dont il y eut puis apres à souffrir en tout le païs, comme verrez cy apres une partie escrit en brief: car iamais on ne pourroit escrire la moitié de ce qu'a esté faict (p.1).

On other occasions, she refuses to relate certain events or conversations which, in her opinion, are too offensive to be put into writing;

... et tant d'autres heresies, que l'on ne scauroit escripre, et quant à moy i'ay grand horreur de les penser et escrire (p.134).

Any incident with doubt cast over its veracity is omitted by the author, for whom precision is of prime importance:

mais ie n'en sçay rien au vray, parquoy ie ne 'escriis point  
(p.89).

Accordingly, Jussie is ever-eager to assert that any information she does convey is drawn from a reliable authority:

(ainsi qu'il fut dit à moy escrivante d'un homme de bien qui le  
m'affermoit estre vray comme le Pater noster, sur la foy de bon  
Chrestien) et plusieurs autres le raconterent en ceste maniere  
(p.108).

Unlike *La Guerre*, *Le Levain* has a genuine feel of authenticity, achieved essentially by Jussie's self-presentation as eyewitness of the events she is narrating: 'moy qui escry ceci, estant presente' (p.140). Wishing to remain anonymous, Dentièrre, quite understandably, avoids any such compromising statements.

### Keeping a Diary

*Le Levain du Calvinisme* could not be more different from the tightly structured sermon-genre favoured by Marie Dentièrre. In writing her text, Jussie makes no attempt whatsoever to conform to a particular literary model. Her work is perhaps best described as a sort of diary or personal journal; a genre which has, over the centuries, come to be associated with women. The first half of *Le Levain*, in particular, constitutes a patchwork account of happenings taking place over a number of years. The rather abrupt transitions from one event to the next would seem to suggest that the diary was written in stages; sections being added and kept up to date as the Genevan situation changed. An abundance of precise dates, and even times, marked in *Le Levain*, reinforce our impression of the text as a diary-genre. As might be expected in the journal of a nun, most of these dates are noted with reference to the saints' days and festivals of the Catholic church: 'Le iour de Monsieur S. François un mardy à dix heures du matin' (p.8). Entries in Jussie's diary are often superfluous to the central theme, having no bearing on the Genevan situation, but being momentous events of interest in themselves:

En ce mois d'Aoust se montra une grande Comete au ciel, qui  
iettoit sa queue embrasee contre la France, et il fut dict qu'elle  
demonstroït la mort de Madame la Royne Louyse de Savoye  
(p.32).

Such passages underline the spontaneous quality of a text which the author has little concern to edit or polish. Few elaborate rhetorical devices feature in *Le Levain*:

Une Dame de Sainte Claire vous en faict le rapport tout nud,  
et sans fard de langage, tel que ses yeux et ses oreilles le luy  
ont enseigné.<sup>52</sup>

The vehement tone of *La Guerre* is not to be found in *Le Levain*. Having no need to 'shout' in order to make her voice heard, Jussie is able to adopt a more moderate tone for her own work. This unadorned style with its conversational rhythm is, in fact, exactly the sort of writing one might expect to find in a private journal. Moreover, ironically, the naïve freshness of Jussie's account proves to be just as persuasive as the high flown rhetoric of *La Guerre*. The success of *Le Levain du Calvinisme* may be partly attributed to the unusual perspective from which events are recounted. Jussie records the situation in Geneva as it is perceived by the nuns from within the convent. Thus, the view with which we are presented is a partial one, consisting of snippets of sound, and signs of disorder, glimpsed by the nuns from within the walls. As readers, we too are drawn into this claustrophobic atmosphere, sharing the impression of being enclosed and cut off from society;

... et ainsi vivoit on à Geneve tousiours en crainte, et  
melancholie, et surtout les gens de bien, et principalement les  
pauvres dames de Sainte Claire: car tousiours à ces tumultes  
passoient par devant leur Convent, et elles oyant le bruit  
pensoient tousiours qu'on les venoit tirer dehors, ou faire  
quelque grand mal, et ne faut douter que leur repos ne fust petit  
et douteux (p.97).

Such writing recalls passages from Hélienne de Crenne's own diary-like presentation of the outside world, as it is perceived by the protagonist from within her locked room. For many readers, one of the attractions of *Le Levain* is that it paints the picture of a way of life usually shrouded in mystery and privacy, permitting the reader a voyeuristic glimpse at the most hidden members of society. We must, of course, remember that this was most certainly not the author's original intention.

Jussie's journal should not be judged by the same criteria as texts composed by women writers who, by publishing their writing, enter a male-dominated discourse. The difficulties encountered by these women when using a masculine language have already been seen; the tendency towards over-emphasis being one of their most noticeable pitfalls. Such is perhaps 'the traditional fate of the oppressed who try to "pass for" the oppressor' (quoted from Intro.2). Writing outside the patriarchal system, Jussie has no need to compete for a place alongside works by men, and is freed from the necessity of imitating the 'oppressor'. As a consequence, *Le Levain* does not strive to reach out to external sources and, as far as is

possible, remains untainted by any strong influence. Unlike *La Guerre*, where removal of the biblical framework would reduce the text to a state of virtual non-existence, Jussie's work contains no more than a handful of references to Scripture. This is also the mark of the typical Catholic woman writer (see Gabrielle de Bourbon, Section 2 of this chapter). Exempt from the constraints endured by most women writers, Jussie may concentrate her attention on the incidents which are most of interest to herself and the community of Sisters. The focus of her chronicle of Genevan reform is, consequently, heavily one-sided; much space being accorded to the effects of the changes on those in religious orders. Nevertheless, such freedom is, to a certain extent, curbed by Jussie's constant awareness that her diary is to be passed on to posterity. Devices of persuasion tend to be of an unsophisticated character, but are, all the same, present in *Le Levain*. Wishing to provoke pity for the plight of the St Clare nuns, Jussie must repeatedly emphasize the extremity of their suffering, in order to gain her future readers' sympathy. The high point of Jussie's work is most certainly the concluding scene in which the author poignantly depicts the company of nuns on their way out of Geneva, having been driven from the convent. Here, in particular, her attention to detail serves as an effective device of persuasion, ensuring that the reader will empathize with the nuns' situation:

C'estoit chose piteuse de voir ceste sainte compagnie en tel estat, tant affligee de douleur, et de travail, que plusieurs defailloient et se pasmoient par le chemin... il y avoit six pauvres anciennes qui avoient demeuré plus de seze ans en la religion, et les deux passé soixante six sans avoir iamais rien veu de monde, qui se evanouissoient coup à coup, et ne pouvoient porter la force de l'air, et quand elles voyoient quelque bestail ès champs cuidoient des vaches que fussent ours, et des brebis laniées que fussent loups ravissans... et combien que la mere vicaire avoit faict donner à toutes de bons souliers pour les garder de fouller les piedz, la plus part n'y scavoit cheminer, mais les portoient attachez à leur ceinture (pp.211-12).<sup>53</sup>

Another device frequently employed by Jussie is her use of picturesque anecdotes. Her talent for continually relating entertaining stories, within the context of an account of the Genevan Reformation, offers light relief, helping sustain the reader's attention throughout. Humour also plays a major role in maintaining the liveliness of Jussie's narrative. Unlike the rather sophisticated techniques of sarcasm and punning found in *La Guerre*, humour in *Le Levain* seems most commonly to be the result of an unintentional naïveté on the part of the author. On a number of instances in *Le Levain*, Jussie expresses her fervent belief in the occurrence of miracles, which she interprets as signs of God's support of the Catholics. One such example recounts the tale of a Catholic woman who has been hanged on a gibbet beside an



evangelical man. With a degree of humour, which was more than likely unintended, Jussie depicts the dead Catholic woman as valiantly defending her faith:

... miraculeusement se retourne devers ce garçon Lutherien, qui avoit esté mis au gibet apres d'elle, et le mordoit par le menton à gorge ouverte (p.89).

*Le Levain* has a certain charm which is absent from Dentièr's own writing. This may perhaps be best explained by the manner in which Jussie reduces the events of the Reformation to a personal level, interweaving subjective reflections into her chronicle of events:

La veille de Pentecoste à dix heures de nuit les Heretiques couperent les testes à six images devant le portail des Cordeliers, puis les jetterent dedans le puits de Sainte Claire, c'estoit chose piteuse de voir les corps sans teste (p.94).

#### Women and the Reformation

One of the most fascinating characteristics of Jeanne de Jussie's text is its preoccupation with the manner in which the Reformation movement affected women.<sup>54</sup> The all-female sphere in which *Le Levain* is composed permits the author to indulge in discussion of this kind without fears of criticism for her one-sided presentation. It is only within the parameters of an 'artificial' domain such as the convent that this degree of freedom may be achieved, for by the (male) critical standards of the period, Jussie's account would most probably have been termed as trivial or verbose. Consequently, *Le Levain* may be defined as a pervasively female text, being written by, for and about women. From *Le Levain*, we may glean information about the response of both Catholic and Protestant women in Geneva during the pre-Reformation period. According to Jeanne de Jussie, women were much slower to espouse the new faith than their male contemporaries. Throughout *Le Levain*, the author stages scenes which provide an illuminating insight into the active participation of women in the Reformation. Not content to remain on the sidelines, Catholic women in Geneva seem to have favoured an unusually violent response, which was undertaken in groups rather than individually. Speech appears to have played little or no role in the response of these women who would have been poorly qualified to defend themselves against the eloquent, literate female reformers. As we see in Jussie's own chronicle, the Catholic women were forced to

resort to a non-verbal means of protest; physical violence being the only form of antagonism available to them:

Les femmes des Chrestiens s'assemblerent, disant s'il advient que nos maris se combattent contre ces infidelles, allons aussi faire la guerre, et tuer leurs femmes heretiques, affin que toute la race soit exterminée... les femmes portoient pierres en leur giron (p.57).

Full of admiration for the 'Christian' women, Jussie seems unable to accord her total consent to behaviour which errs so far from her vision of the feminine role model. Thus, her careful choice of vocabulary contains a hint of reproach for the methods adopted by these all-female groups: 'se sont monstrees *viriles* contre ces ennemis Lutheriens' (p.113). The violence of the Catholic women is confirmed by Fromment who records several episodes of female group aggression, including an incident where he was himself victim of such an attack (see Chapter V, 'Comment l'on voulut iecter une foys Fromment au Rosne, et comment fust saulvé de la main des femmes').

Group activity seems to have been rarer amongst the evangelical women whose response to the reform in Geneva is depicted as being of a much more individual nature. The only episode of organized antagonism, related by Jussie, is the women's non-violent, yet provocative, disregard for religious festivals. Flaunting their disrespect, the evangelical women are pictured deliberately working with their distaffs in order to taunt those involved in a passing procession:

Le iour de la feste Dieu les Chrestiens prindrent courage de faire la Procession ordinaire par la ville: plusieurs femmes Lutheriennes portans le chaperon de velours, se mirent aux fenestres, afin que chacun leur veit filler leur quenouille, et travailler de l'esguille, et toutes les Festes passoient la iournee en pleine rue plus qu'és autres iours, dequoy les Chrestiens en estoient fort marris (pp.94-95).

Jussie extends her own anecdote into a somewhat burlesque tale, describing how the Catholic women turn a pacific demonstration into an aggressive one:

Ainsi que la procession passoit quelqu'un alla tirer la quenouille du costé d'une grosse lutherienne, et luy en donna un grand coup sur la teste (p.95).

The use of the distaff by women on both sides is interesting. Generally a symbol of feminine passivity, here, the distaff is rid of its original connotations. By the women themselves, it is transformed into a symbol of partisan dissent, now becoming a useful means of self-expression which has the advantage of requiring no speech. Similar examples whereby the distaff is transformed into a weapon for use by the female sex have already been observed

(see Chapter 1, Section 1). The behaviour of the St Clare nuns is generally less violent. However, no individually initiated activity is attributed to them; their sole response being a collective one. Their failure to speak for themselves means that all individuality is effaced, leaving the reader unable to distinguish one character from another. Sacrificing their own personal voice, the nuns speak with the multiple voice of an all-female group:

Toutes furent d'une mesme volonté, d'une mesme response, et consentement comme s'il fut party tout d'un coeur, et d'une voix, sans nulle difference, dequoy les adversaires furent grandement esmerveillez de les voir toutes d'une mesme parole (p.192).

It is with this very voice, representative of all the women, that Jussie writes *Le Levain*, a work which is personal not just to the author herself, but to the community of St Clare as a whole.

It is perhaps useful at this point to return to Bakhtin and his concept of the chain of speech (see Intro.1). Challenging the theory that language is based chiefly on man's need to express himself, Bakhtin envisages speech as a considerably more complex process in which the listener/reader plays an essential role. In Bakhtin's opinion, all speech anticipates the reaction of the addressee and is constructed in accordance with the anticipated response of the audience:

These considerations also determine my choice of compositional devices, and, finally, my choice of language vehicles, that is, the *style* of my utterance (quoted from Intro.1).

Having examined the works of both Marie Dentièrre and Jeanne de Jussie, we may conclude that their differences in style may be attributed as much to their awareness of their position in the chain of speech, as to their opposite ideologies. The style of each of these women's texts is dictated principally by the wish to elicit approval from their different reading publics. From my study of several sixteenth-century women writers, it seems possible to define radical speech accommodation as an essentially feminine phenomenon. This is not to say that male writers have total disregard for their own audience. However, as the dominant contributors in the chain of speech, sixteenth-century men may be said to have a much greater degree of freedom than their female contemporaries in their choice both of what they say, and to whom they say it.

## CONCLUSION

The study of the group of texts by women writers of the early Renaissance period highlights the extent to which the male notion of woman has influenced such writing. In Part 1 of my thesis, it was seen that the male writer repeatedly takes advantage of his authoritative role, using the literary text as a tool by which to manipulate the female reader, presenting her with his own ideal image of the female sex. One of the most important aspects of the model intended for emulation by women was found to be the desire for restrained speech, or even for total silence. Through the very act of speaking/writing, the sixteenth-century woman is, in fact, rejecting the ideal of feminine behaviour which pervades the male literature of the period. However, in spite of this apparent disobedience, the private, inward-looking and frequently self-deprecating character of women's writing still points to the female writer's submission to male precepts. In this way, it may be said that, for the sixteenth-century woman, the restrictive role of reader exerts an unavoidable influence on her position as woman writer.

An examination of women writers in the early sixteenth-century reveals that it is possible to define certain recurrent thematic and stylistic characteristics of the feminine text. These similarities enable us to view women's writings as constituting a viable corpus for literary study. By recovering 'lost' women writers, we may begin to recreate a female, literary tradition which, although barely visible, *does* exist, running parallel with the more obvious male tradition. Seen in terms of speech, the study of little-known women writers becomes a means of filling in the silences of a conversation which has, for centuries, been dominated by male speakers. By listening to these female voices more than four hundred years later, the modern-day reader may be said to be playing the important role of finally releasing the sixteenth-century woman from the confines of the Renaissance household and according her a place, for the first time, in the outside, public world.

## NOTES

## INTRODUCTION: PART ONE

1. *Le Courtisan de Messire Baltazar de Castillon*, translated by Mellin de Saint-Gellais (Lyons: François Juste, 1538), BN Rés R.2049, Bk 1, f.xxxviii ro.
2. *Les Oeuvres de Mes Dames des Roches de Poitiers, Mere et Fille* (Paris: Abel l'Angelier, 1578), BN Rés Ye 521, sig. a2 ro.
3. See Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, translated by Vern W. McGee and edited by C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin, 1980), pp.60-102. My intention is to use certain aspects of this essay in order to introduce major themes in my thesis. I realize that my reading of the essay does little justice to the complexity of Bakhtin's own theories. However, such a study is far from being my aim. For further discussion of literature as a speech genre, see Roger Fowler, *Literature as Social Discourse: The Practice of Linguistic Criticism* (London, 1981).
4. Bakhtin, pp.61-62.
5. Bakhtin, p.69.
6. Bakhtin, p.69.
7. Bakhtin, pp.95-96.
8. Dale Spender, *The Writing or the Sex? Or why you don't have to read women's writing to know it's no good* (Pergamon Press, 1989), p.11.
9. Cheris Kramarae, *Women and Men Speaking: Frameworks for Analysis* (Rowley, London and Tokyo, 1981), p.118.
10. See Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place* (London, San Francisco, New York and Hagerstown, 1975); Cheris Kramarae, 'Perceptions of Female and Male Speech', *Language and Speech*, 20, no.2 (April/June, 1977), pp.151-61, or Cheris Kramarae, *The Voices and Words of Women and Men* (Pergamon Press, 1980).
11. Marguerite de Navarre, *Heptaméron*, edited by Simone de Reyff (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), p.396.
12. Bakhtin, p.97.
13. *Women and Men Speaking*, p.101.

14. *Women and Men Speaking*, p.101.
15. See Josephine Donovan, 'Beyond the net: Feminist Criticism as a Moral Criticism', in *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader*, edited by K.M. Newton (London, 1988), pp.264-68 (p.264).
16. Donovan, p.264.
17. I have coined the term 'textual harrassment' from Mary Jacobus' essay, 'Is There a Woman in This Text?', *New Literary History*, 14 (Fall, 1982), pp.117-41 (p.119).
18. Donovan, p.266.
19. Quoted from Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London, Melbourne and Henley, 1983), p.52.
20. Culler, p.53.
21. K.K. Ruthven, *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1984), p.73.

## NOTES

## CHAPTER ONE

1. Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge, 1980), pp.82-83.
2. Maclean, p.82.
3. Maclean, p.2.
4. Gratien Du Pont, *Les Controverses des Sexes Masculin et Femenin* (Toulouse: Jacques Colomiés, 1534), BN m. 3034 (Microfilm), f.lxxii vo.
5. See Rabelais, *Le Tiers Livre*, edited by M.A. Screech (Geneva, 1964), for a well-known passage describing the mobile womb:  
 Nature leurs a dedans le corps posé en lieu secret et intestin un animal, un membre, lequel n'est es hommes, ou quel quelques foyes sont engendrées certaines humeurs salses, nitreuses, bauracineuses, acres... par la poincture et fretillement douloureux des quelles (car ce membre est tout nerveux et de vif sentement) tout le corps est en elles esbranlé, tous les sens raviz, toutes affections interinées, tous pensemens confonduz (pp.227-28).
6. G. Bouchet, *Les Serées* (1584), quoted from Madeleine Lazard, *Images Littéraires de la Femme à la Renaissance* (Paris, 1985), p.17.
7. Maclean, p.46.
8. *De Nobilitate et Praecellentia Foeminei Sexus* was first published in Antwerp in 1529. Quotations will be taken from the French translation: Henri Corneille Agrippa, *De la Noblesse et Preexcellence du Sexe Foeminin* (Paris: Denys Janot, n.d. [1530]), BN Rés. p.R. 858. For a recent translation into French, see *De Nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, edited by R. Antonioli (Geneva, 1990). *De Nobilitate* appears to have been influenced by a Spanish work, which outlines identical arguments: Rodriguez de la Camaron, *Le Triumphe des Dames* (Paris: Pierre le Caron, n.d., [1500-1502]), BN Rés. R. 982.
9. Useful studies on this subject include *Distaves And Dames: Renaissance Treatises For And About Women*, facsimile reproductions with an introduction by Diane Bornstein (Delmar, New York, 1978); Diane Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, Connecticut, 1983); Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana, 1956).

10. One exception is Jean Marot's *Le Doctrinal des Princesses et Nobles Dames*, in *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1723; Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 1970), pp.177-90. The work consists of twenty-four *rondeaux*. The date of composition is uncertain, but has been estimated c.1512.
11. Natalie Zemon Davis, 'City Women and Religious Change', in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975), pp.65-95 (p.70).
12. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, 'The Heroics of Virginity: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation', in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance - Literary and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse, 1986), pp.29-72 (p.32).
13. St Jerome's letter to Eustochius quoted from J. Tibbetts Schulenburg, p.34.
14. Erasmus, *Le Mariage Chrétien ou traité dans lequel on apprend à ceux qui se veulent engager dans le Mariage, ou qui y sont déjà engagez, les règles qu'ils doivent suivre pour s'y comporter d'une manière Chrétienne*, translated by Claude Bosc (Paris: François Babuty, 1714), BN D. 14012 (Microfiche), p.181. The original Latin version *Christiani Matrimonii Institutio* was first published in Basle, 1526. Erasmus' work, composed in Latin and not translated into the French vernacular during the sixteenth century, is unlikely to have been read by many women. However, I have included quotations from the *Mariage Chrétien* on account of the fact that the text bears witness to the sort of attitudes to women, held by male writers in the early Renaissance period. Considering that much of the advice of the *Mariage Chrétien* concerns women, it seems possible to suggest that Erasmus' words were intended to be conveyed to women via the intermediary figure of a father or husband.
15. An extract from the thirteenth-century English treatise *Hali Meidenhad* quoted from Angela M. Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages: Religion, Marriage, and Letters* (Brighton, 1983), p.23.
16. Jean Bouchet, *Epistres Morales et familiares du traverseur*, introduced by Jennifer Beard (Poitiers: J. and E. de Marnef, 1545; Johnson Reprint Corporation, Mouton, 1969), *Ep.Mor.* 4, f.17 vo. I should note that this *epistre* is not representative of Bouchet's morality in general. His intention in the *Epistres Morales et familiares* seems to have been to attract as wide a readership as possible, addressing letters to people of all ranks. Consequently, elsewhere, Bouchet underlines the joys of parenthood and marriage.
17. Vives, *Institution de la femme Chrestienne tant en son Enfance, que Mariage et Viduité. Aussi, de l'Office du Mary*, translated by Pierre de Changy (Lyons: Sulpice Sabon for A. Constantin, n.d.), BN Rés. D. 54643, p.165. This edition may be dated between 1541 and 1543. A. Constantin was only present in Lyons between 1541 and 1549. Moreover, an edition of the work in 1543 (Paris: J. Kerver) is obviously posterior, for it contains a verse addressed to the translator's son concerning the death of his father. The original Latin version *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* was first published in 1523. The work was written as a guide for the education of Princess Mary and dedicated to Queen Catherine of England.
18. Tertullian, *La Toilette des Femmes (De Cultu Feminarum)*, edited by Marie Turcan (Paris, 1971), p.165. This text was widely available in Latin in the sixteenth century.



The first French translation seems to have been in 1580 (Geneva: J. de Laon). See *Deux traitez de Florent Tertullian*, BN R. 24040.

19. *Doctrine for the Lady*, p.98.
20. In Cotgrave's *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London, 1611; reprinted and introduced by W.S. Woods, Columbia, 1968), 'touret de nez' is translated as *muffler*.
21. Chevalier de La Tour-Landry, *Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry: Pour l'enseignement de ses filles*, edited by Anatole de Courde de Montaiglon (Paris, 1854), pp.40-41. The work was written in 1371. For discussion of editions and manuscripts, see preface, pp.xxxvii-lvi.
22. Quoted from Huguet, *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française du XVIe Siècle*, 7 vols (Paris, 1925-67), II, p.54 (see under 'cajolleur').
23. K. Lorenz, quoted from *Women and Men Speaking*, p.58.
24. Michel Jeanneret, *Des Mets et Des Mots: Banquets et Propos de Table à la Renaissance* (Paris, 1987), p.15.
25. See Barbara Diefendorf, 'Widowhood and Remarriage in Sixteenth-Century Paris', *Journal of Family History*, 7 (Winter, 1982), pp.379-95 (p.386).
26. Anon., *Cy commence une petite instruction et maniere de vivre pour une femme seculiere* (Paris: Guillaume Merlin, n.d.), BN Rés 8<sup>o</sup> Z don 594 (318), sig. B1 ro. In her brief analysis of this work, Alice Hentsch suggests that this edition dates from c. 1530. See *De la Littérature Didactique du Moyen Age* (Cahors, 1903), pp.223-26.
27. Maclean, pp.59-60.
28. Anon., *Monologue fort joyeux auquel sont introduictz deux Advocatz et ung Juge, devant lequel est plaidoyé le bien et le mal des Dames* (Paris, n.d. [1530]), in *Recueil de Poésies Françaises des XVe et XVIe Siècles*, edited by Anatole de Courde de Montaiglon, 13 vols (Paris, 1876), XI, p.190.
29. Francesco Barbaro, *Les Deux Livres de l'estat du Mariage* translated by Martin du Pin (Paris: G. de Luyne, 1667), BN R. 20789, p.107. The Latin *De Re Uxoria*, composed in 1416, was first published in Paris in 1513. The theme of the sun and moon as representative of husband and wife is a common recurrent theme in courtesy literature. However, it is not new to the sixteenth century and may be traced back at least as far as Plutarch's *Moralia*.
30. Hélienne de Crenne, *Les Angoysses douloureuses qui procedent d'amours*, edited by P. Demats (Paris, 1968), p.32. For further bibliographical details, see Chapter 4, note 1.

31. Anne de Beaujeu, *Les Enseignements d'Anne de France, duchesse de Bourbonnais et d'Auvergne, à sa fille Suzanne de Bourbon* (Lyons, n.d.), BN Rés. D. 80044, sig. B5 ro. The work was composed c.1503, but not published until 1521. This text will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter (see 'Female Perspectives'). For a useful comparison, see the thirteenth-century work, *L'Enseignement de Saint Loys à sa fille Isabelle*, in *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, edited by Naudet and Daunon (Paris, 1840), XX, p.302, note 2. Although serving as a model for *Les Enseignements d'Anne de France*, Louis' text, with its repeated exhortation to Christian humility, lacks any of the practical advice featuring in Anne's writing.
32. Anon, *Les Quinze Joies de Mariage*, edited by J.Rychner (Paris and Geneva, 1963), p. 92. See Chapter 3, note 15.
33. *L'Ecole des Femmes* (Paris: Classiques Larousse, 1990), Act 1, Scene 1, ll.100-102.
34. Pierre de Lesnauderie, *La Louenge de Mariage et recueil des hystoires des bonnes, vertueuses et illustres femmes* (Paris: Pierre Sergeant, n.d.[c.1530]), BN Rés. m.R. 86, f.i ro.
35. For other works on marriage, see, in particular, Erasmus, *Encomium Matrimonii* (1518), translated c.1525 by the Chevalier de Berquin, as *Declamation des Louenges de Mariage*, which may be consulted in a facsimile edition, introduced by Emile V.Telle (Geneva, 1976). See also, Agrippa's *Bresfve declamation du Sainct Sacrement de Mariage* (1526), in *Chemins de L'Hérésie*, edited by E. Droz (Geneva, 1971).
36. *Images Littéraires de Femme*, p.118.
37. *Doctrine for the Lady*, p.119.
38. *The Lady in the Tower*, p.71.
39. *The Lady in the Tower*, p.27.
40. *L'Avision-Christine*, edited by M.L. Towner (Washington D.C., 1932), p.86. For further discussion of *L'Avision-Christine*, see Maureen Slattery Durley, 'The Crowned Dame, Dame Opinion, and Dame Philosophy: The Female Characteristics of Three Ideals in Christine de Pizan's *L'Avision Christine*', in *Ideals for Women in the Works of Christine de Pizan*, edited by Diane Bornstein, Medieval and Renaissance Monograph Series (Detroit, Michigan, 1981), pp.29-50.
41. Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre des Trois Vertus*, edited by Charity Cannon Willard (Paris, 1989), p.193. Printed versions of this work in the sixteenth century take the title *Le Trésor de la Cité des Dames* (see Paris: Denis Janot, 1536, BN Rés. Y<sup>2</sup> 2073). See also, Charity Cannon Willard, 'Christine de Pizan's *Livre des trois vertus*: Feminine Ideal or Practical Advice?', in *Ideals for Women*, pp.91-116; or, Diane Bornstein, 'The Ideal of the Lady of the Manor as Reflected in Christine de Pizan's *Livre des trois vertus*', in *Ideals for Women*, pp.117-28.

42. Ruth Kelso, *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century* (Glouster, Mass., 1964), p.11. For a bibliographical list of treatises on the gentleman, published in Europe before 1625, see pp.169-277.
43. *Institutio Principis Christiani*, edited by A.H.T. Levi, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 86 vols (Toronto, 1986), XXVII, pp.199-288.
44. There are printed Latin versions of the *Sophologium* in France from at least 1475 (Paris) up to c.1516. It first appeared in French as *Le Livre Intitulé des bonnes moeurs* (Chablis: P. le Rouge, 1478). My references are taken from *Le Trésor de Sapience et fleur de toute bonté. Remply de plusieurs bonnes autoritez des saiges philosophes et aultres. Lequel enseigne la voye et le chemin que l'homme doibt tenir en ce monde durant le temps de sa calamiteuse vie* (Paris: Alain Lotrian, 1539), BN Rés. D 80273.
45. *Le Guidon des Parens en instruction et direction de leurs enfans* (Paris: Gilles Gourmont, n.d. [1513]), BN Rés. R. 2160, f.xii ro. In this edition, the translator, Jean Lodé, wrongly attributes the original work to Francisco Filelfo.
46. 'L'Office du Mary' forms a kind of appendix to Vives' *Institution de la femme Chrestienne*. Page numbers refer to the edition cited in note 17.
47. Diane Bornstein, *Mirrors of Courtesy* (Hamden, Connecticut, 1975), p.17.
48. For further discussion of the historical changes of this period, see, W.L. Wiley, *The Gentleman of Renaissance France* (West Port, Connecticut, 1971), Chapter 1.
49. The work was first translated into French in 1537. All my references are taken from Erasmus, *La Civilité Puérile* (Lyons: Jean de Tournes, 1544), BN Rés p.R. 376.
50. Richard A. Lanham, *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (Newhaven and London, 1976), p.150.
51. *De recta latini graecique sermonis pronuntiatione dialogus*, edited by J.K. Sowards, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 86 vols (Toronto, 1985), XXVI, pp.347-475 (p.369). The work was first published in Paris by Robert Estienne in 1530.
52. *Traité d'éducation du Cardinal Sadolet*, translated by P. Charpenne (Paris, 1855), pp.213-14.
53. Lanham, p.4
54. Symphorien Champier, *Cy commence ung autre petit livre intitulé le doctrinal du pere de famille à son enfant pour le regir et gouverner à toute perfection*, found after *La Nef des princes et des Batailles de noblesse avec aultres enseignemens utilz et profitables à toutes manieres de gens pour congnoistre à bien vivre et mourir* (Lyons: Guillaume Balsarin, 1502), BN Rés. Ye 853, f.xlix ro. This work consists of a compilation of several other short treatises for men.

55. For further discussion on the rhetorical tradition of the Renaissance, see *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the theory and practice of Renaissance Rhetoric*, edited by James J. Murphy (London, 1983), or Michael F.O. Jenkins, *Artful Eloquence: Jean Lemaire de Belges and the Rhetorical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, 1980), Chapter 1, 'Rhetoric from Classical Antiquity to the Sixteenth-Century'.
56. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, translated by Harry Caplan, (London, 1981), p.5.
57. Rabelais, *Gargantua*, edited by M.A. Screech (Geneva, 1970), pp.100-101. Tiberius Gracchus was a Roman orator and E. Aemilius Paulus an orator whose skills were praised by Cicero.
58. The importance of refined language was not short lived. Stephano Guazzo's *Civile Conversazione* in the second part of the sixteenth century provides evidence of the prolongation of this facet of the masculine ideal.
59. See Wayne A. Rebhorn, 'The Enduring word: Language, Time and History in *Il Libro del Cortegiano*', in *Castiglione. The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture*, edited by R.W. Hanning and D. Rosand (London, 1983), pp.69-90.
60. See T.M. Greene, '*Il Cortegiano* and the choice of a game', in *Castiglione. The Ideal and the Real*, pp.1-15.
61. Greene, p.9.

## NOTES

## CHAPTER TWO

1. One such example occurs in a letter addressed to Marguerite de Navarre, preceding Jehan du Pré's *Le Palais des Nobles Dames* (n.p., n.d. [c.1534]), BN Rés. Ye 1255, where the author speaks of 'la querelle des honnestes femmes' (sig. a3 ro).
2. Anon., *La Louenge et Beauté des Dames*, in *Recueil de Poésies Françaises des XVe et XVIe Siècles*, edited by Anatole de Courde de Montaignon, 13 vols (Paris, 1857), VII, p.287. The date of this work is unknown, but may be estimated as being at the end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth centuries.
3. Matheolus, *Les Lamentations de Mathéolus et Le Livre de Leesce de Jean Le Fèvre de Resson*, edited by A.G. Van Hamel, 2 vols (Paris, 1892-1905), I, p.2 and p.3. Matheolus' work, written shortly after the *Roman de la Rose*, was originally in Latin (*Liber Lamentationum Matheoluli*). Jean Le Fèvre translated it into French c. 1373, also composing a book of his own, known as the *Rebours de Matheolus* or the *Livre de Leesce* (see *Le Rebours de Matheolus*, Paris: Michel Le Noir, 1518, BN Rés. Ye 256).
4. Symphorien Champier, *La Grant Malice des Femmes*, in *Nef des princes*, f.xlv vo.
5. Emile Telle, *L'Oeuvre de Marguerite d'Angoulême Reine de Navarre et la Querelle des Femmes* (Toulouse, 1937; Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 1969), p.44. For a discussion of the *Querelle* in general, see pp.9-68.
6. Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*, translated by E. Hicks and T. Moreau (Paris, 1986), p.36. For the original work, see BN ms. fr. 1177. See also, Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan's Cité des Dames* (Ithaca and London, 1991).
7. K.K. Ruthven, p.85.
8. Anon., *Dialogue apologetique excusant ou defendant le devot sexe femenin* (Paris, 1516), BN Rés. p.R. 268.
9. Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (London, 1990), p.308. For a useful discussion of the *Querelle*, see, in particular, pp.86-94.
10. Bertrand Desmarins de Masan, *Le Rousier des Dames*, in *Recueil de Poésies Françaises*, edited by A. de Courde de Montaignon, 13 vols (Paris, 1856), V, pp.198-99. The original edition of *Le Rousier* lacks mention of both its date and place of publication. However, another work by the same author indicates that he was being

- read at the beginning of the sixteenth century. See *Les Cinq Parcelles d'amours* (Paris: D. Janot, 1539).
11. Quoted from M.A. Screech, *The Rabelaisian Marriage* (London, 1958), p.10. For the *Querelle*, see pp.5-13.
  12. Anon., *La Grand Loyaulté des Femmes* (n.p., n.d. [c.1525]). An extract of the text appears in *Romania*, 15 (1886), p.400.
  13. Martin Le Franc, *Le Champion des Dames* (Paris: Galliot du Pré, 1530), BN Rés. Ye 4031. *Le Champion* was written between 1440 and 1442 and first appeared in print in Lyons, 1485.
  14. *Doctrine for the Lady*, p.8. The *Querelle* is dealt with extensively in Chapter 2, 'Women in the Scheme of Things'.
  15. *Doctrine for the Lady*, p.5.
  16. Christine de Pizan, *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours*, in *Oeuvres de Christine de Pisan*, edited by Maurice Roy, 3 vols (Paris, 1891), II, pp.1-27 (p.10). The work was written in 1399.
  17. Quoted from E. Telle, p.43.
  18. See Guillaume Alexis, *Le Debat de l'homme et de la femme*, in *Oeuvres Poétiques de Guillaume Alexis*, Société des Anciens Textes Français, 3 vols (Paris, 1896; Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), I, pp.121-55. The work was written c.1460 and printed in numerous editions between 1490 and 1530. An English translation was also made c.1530.
  19. Jean Marot, *La vray disant Advocate des Dames*, in *Recueil de Poésies Françaises*, edited by A. de Courde de Montaignon, 13 vols (Paris, 1875), X, p.264. The solution (given by the author) is as follows: 'Ung grand sousfleur de sa gueulle a soufflé/ Vent superflu d'ont s'est trouvé surpris' (p.265).
  20. As a challenge to the misogynistic sections of the *Roman de la Rose*, Christine de Pizan wrote her *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours* which appears to have triggered off a whole series of letters (known as the *Querelle de la Rose*). These letters were sent by Christine and her ally Jean Gerson to their opponents Jean de Montreuil and Gontier and Pierre Col. See *La Querelle de la Rose: Letters and Documents*, edited by J.L. Baird and J.R. Kane (Chapel Hill, 1978), and *Le Débat sur Le Roman de la Rose*, edited by E. Hicks (Paris, 1977).
  21. Anon., *Le Giroufflier aux Dames. Ensemble le Dit des douze Sibilles*, in *Recueil de Poésies Françaises*, edited by A. de Courde de Montaignon, 13 vols (Paris, 1878), XIII, pp.255-56. An early printed edition of the *Giroufflier* exists which has been dated c.1510.

22. See D'Estrées, *Le Contreblason de Faulses Amours*, in *Oeuvres Poétiques de Guillaume Alexis*, 3 vols (Paris, 1896), I, pp.273-344. The work was composed c.1512 and exists in several editions up to 1516.
23. In the manner of *De Claris Mulieribus*, several works exist which consist almost solely of a list of famous women. It would appear that these works were intended specifically for women readers, as they have a moral rather than a polemical intent. See Jehan Du Pré, *Le Palais des Nobles Dames*; Antoine Dufour, *Les Vies des Femmes Célèbres*, edited by G. Jeanneau (Geneva, 1970) (the work was probably composed c.1504); Jean Bouchet, *Le Jugement poétique de l'honneur féminin* (Poitiers: Jean and Enguilbert de Marnef, 1538), BN Rés Ye 363.
24. Maclean, p.58.
25. *Le Livre de Jehan Bocasse de la louenge et vertu des nobles et cleres dames* (Paris: A. Verard, 1493), BN Rés. G. 365, sig. a2 vo.
26. For a fully comprehensive survey of the sixteenth-century collected editions of the *Blasons Anatomiques*, see Alison Saunders, *The Sixteenth-Century Blason Poétique*, University of Durham Publications (Berne, Frankfurt am Main and Las Vegas, 1981), Appendix, Part 1, pp.310-25. For all bibliographical material concerning individual *blasons*, see this study.
27. Clément Marot, *Les Epîtres*, edited by C.A. Mayer (London, 1958), p.214. The *blasons* mentioned by Marot (written in the year following the *Beau Tétin*) have been attributed to the following authors: *Les Cheveux*, Jean de Vauzelles; *Le Cœur*, Albert le Grand; *La Cuyse*, Jacques Le Lieur; *La Main*, Claude Chappuys; *L'Oeil*, Antoine Héroët; *L'Esprit*, Lancelot de Carle; *La Bouche*, Victor Brodeau; *La Larme*, Maurice Scève; *L'Oreille*, Albert le Grand; *Le Sourcil*, Maurice Scève.
28. *Sixteenth-Century Blason Poétique*, p.114, note 10.
29. Gilles d'Aurigny, *L'Ongle*, in A.M. Schmidt, *Poètes du XVIe Siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 327.
30. Hugues Salel, *L'Anneau*, in Schmidt, p.352.
31. Mellin de Saint Gelais later wrote two *blasons* in praise of hair and the eye.
32. Jean de Vauzelles, *Les Cheveux*, in Schmidt, p.303.
33. François Sagon, *Le Pied*, in Schmidt, p.344.
34. Jeanne Flore (writing in the 1530's) provides an exception to this rule, with her bold expression of female desire in the *Comptes Amoureux*. However, it is possibly for this reason that there is so much speculation over the author's true gender (see Chapter 4, Section 3).

35. Sebillet, *Art Poétique François* (Paris: la Veuve François Regnault, 1555; Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 1972), f.65 ro.
36. Saunders notes the existence of an edition entitled *Les Blasons et Contreblasons du corps masculin et féminin* (Paris: for la Veuve Jean Bonfons, n.d.). However, the title is evidently a careless one, for the poems contained in this edition only concern the female body.
37. Quoted from *Sixteenth-Century Blason Poétique*, p.296.
38. For a discussion of woman as reader, see Nancy K. Miller, 'Rereading as a woman: The body in practice', in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by S.R. Suleiman (London, 1986), pp.354-62.
39. Jacques Peletier du Mans, *Le Coeur*, in Schmidt, p.333.
40. Mellin de Saint Gelais, *L'Oeil*, in Schmidt, pp.312-13.
41. Claude Chappuys, *La Main*, in Schmidt, p.326.
42. Victor Brodeau, *La Bouche*, in Schmidt, p.319.
43. Jacques Peletier, *Le Coeur*, in Schmidt, pp.332-33.
44. Eustorg de Beaulieu, *La Joue*, in Schmidt, p.317.
45. L.D. Kritzman, 'Architecture of the Utopian Body: The *Blasons* of Marot and Ronsard', in *The Rhetoric of Sexuality and the Literature of the French Renaissance* (Cambridge, New York etc., 1991), pp.97-111 (p.102).
46. Albert le Grand, *L'Oreille*, in Schmidt, p.308.
47. Hugues Salel, *L'Anneau*, in Schmidt, p.352.
48. François Berenger de la Tour d'Albenas, *Le Miroir*, in Schmidt, p.355.
49. Clément Marot, *Les Epigrammes*, edited by C.A. Mayer (London, 1970), p.157.
50. Anon., *Le Ventre*, in Schmidt, p.334.
51. Anon., *Blason du C.*, in *Blasons anatomiques du corps féminin*, edited by P. Laine and P. Quignard (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p.106.
52. For further reading, see M. Françon, *Notes sur l'esthétique de la femme au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Harvard University Press, 1939).



53. Schmidt, p.293.
54. Kritzman, p.101.
55. Schmidt, p.293.
56. Claude Chappuys, *La Main*, in Schmidt, p.326.
57. Susan Gubar, 'The Blank Page and the Issues of Female Creativity', in *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, literature and theory*, edited by Elaine Showalter (New York, 1985), pp.292-313 (pp.292-93).
58. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by M. Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1986), p.231.
59. Jacques Le Lieur, *La Cuisse*, in Schmidt, p.342.
60. Albert Le Grand, *L'Oreille*, in Schmidt, p.307.
61. Maurice Scève, *Le Sourcil*, in Schmidt, p.310.
62. Eustorg de Beaulieu, *La Joue*, in Schmidt, p.317.
63. Anon., *Le Ventre*, in Schmidt, p.333.
64. Bonaventure Des Périers, *Le Nombril*, in Schmidt, p.335.
65. Gilles d'Aurigny, *L'Ongle*, in Schmidt, p.328.
66. Antoine Heroet, *L'Oeil*, in Schmidt, p.311.
67. Kritzman, p.102.
68. See *Sixteenth-Century Blason Poétique*, pp.140-57.
69. Gilles Corrozet, *Les Blasons Domestiques* (Paris, 1865), f.20 ro. The text is a reprint of the 1539 edition (Paris: Gilles Corrozet).
70. The main French emblem writers include Guillaume de La Perrière, *Le Theatre des bons engins* (1539) and *La Morosophie* (1553); Gilles Corrozet, *Hécatomgraphie* (1540) and *Emblemes* (1543); Guillaume Guérault, *Le Premier Livre des Emblemes* (1550) and Barthélemy Aneau, *L'Imagination poetique* (1552). The greater part of my examples will be drawn from the two earlier works: Guillaume de La Perrière, *Le Theatre des bons engins* (Paris: Denis Janot, 1539; reprinted with introduction by Greta Dexter, Scholar's facsimiles and reprints, Gainesville, 1964); Gilles Corrozet, *Hécatomgraphie*, edited by Ch. Oulmont (Paris, 1905). This text is based on the 1540

Paris edition by Denis Janot. Reference will also be made to Guillaume Guérout, *Le Premier Livre des Emblemes* (Lyons: B. Arnoullet, 1550), BN Rés. Ye 1407.

71. Alciati's *Emblematum Liber* was first published in Augsburg by H. Steyner in 1531. In 1536, the work was translated by Jehan Le Fevre as *Livret des emblemes* (Paris: Christian Wechel). All page references will be taken from: *Les Emblemes de M. André Alciat - traduits en ryme françoise par Jean Le Fevre* (Lyons: Jean de Tournes, 1549), Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 8° B 32967.
72. See, for example, Hessel Miedema, 'The term *Emblema* in Alciati', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 31 (1968), pp.234-50.
73. Alison Saunders, *The Sixteenth-Century French Emblem Book - A Decorative and Useful Genre* (Geneva, 1988), Chapter 1, 'Theories and Theorists, Ancient and Modern'.
74. Miedema, p.239.
75. Daniel S. Russell, *The Emblem and Device in France* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1985), pp. 87-88.
76. Guillaume de La Perrière, *La Morosophie* (Lyons: Macé Bonhomme, 1553), BN Rés. p.Ye 1672, title page.
77. *Sixteenth-Century French Emblem Book*, pp.29-43.
78. This particular quotation serves as evidence that even Alciati's translators appear to view the purpose of the emblem book in a different light from the originator of the genre.
79. Marguerite de Navarre visited Toulouse in 1535 when she was presented with the emblem book. However, as is explained in his dedicatory *épître*, La Perrière did not have time to complete the work before her arrival and so his first (unpublished) book included only fifty of the emblems.
80. La Perrière's misogyny is confirmed by the presence of a laudatory *épître* to Gratien Du Pont incorporated into the front of the edition of *Les Controverses des Sexes Masculin et Femenin*.
81. Later, La Perrière appears to have been more sensitive to Marguerite's ideas and sex, for his work *Les Cent Considerations d'Amour* (1543) deals solely with the subject of love and is neo-platonic and petrarchan in inspiration.
82. Some years after the bulk of the French emblem books had been published, a female writer, Georgette de Montenay, produced her own book of emblems called *Emblemes, ou devises Chrestiennes* (Lyons: J. Marcorelle, 1571; Facsimile edition by C.N. Smith, Menston, 1973). Unlike the previous emblem books, the work is a specifically Christian collection.

83. The expression 'vent de la chemise' has sexual connotations, as is illustrated by a quotation from Champier's *La Grant Malice*:  
     Si finist La Malice des femmes  
     Qu'est imprimé nouvellement,  
     Et vous jure par mon serment  
     Que plaisir leur devez faire souvent  
     Pour avoir de la chemise le vent  
     (f.xlviii vo).
84. Phidias (c.490-530) was a famous Athenian sculptor.
85. I have not been able to find the exact meaning of 'boidies' which is absent from Huguet, *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française*. However, we may guess that it refers to movement of some kind.
86. The association between the decorative arts and literature is confirmed in Jean Lemaire de Belges' *Les Illustrations*, I.4 (see Chapter 3, note 1): 'au moyen desdits escrits imparfaits et mal corrigez, sest ensuyvi, que toutes peintures et tapisseries modernes de quelque riche et coustengeuse estoffe quelles puissent estre, si elles sont faites apres le patron desdites corrompues histoires, perdent beaucoup de leur estime et reputation entre gens savans et entenduz'.
87. For example: 'Il est bon de lyre et je le conseille', Vives, *Institution de la femme*, p.16.
88. The 'livret du preudhomme de saint Lis' may refer to *L'Enseignement de Saint Loys à sa fille Isabelle* which was certainly well-known to Anne de Beaujeu. 'Les sommes le roy' is a moral text written by a Dominican named Laurent. It is also known as *La Somme des Vices et Vertus* (Paris: A. Verard, n.d.[1488]). 'Lorologe de sapience' is a translation of Henricus Suso's *Horologium eterne sapiente* (see *l'Orloge de sapience*, Paris: A. Verard, 1493).
89. Vives, *De Ratione Studii-Puerilis* (1523), in *Opera*, 2 vols (Basle, 1555), I, pp.1-12.
90. It has been suggested that the grammar books to be avoided may include the many arrangements and commentaries of medieval text books which were popular in the sixteenth century. See Christine M. Hill, 'Symphorien Champier's views on Education in the *Nef des Princes* and the *Nef des Dames Vertueuses*', *French Studies*, 7 (1953), pp.323-34 (p.329).
91. Vives: *On Education. A Translation of the De Tradendis Disciplinis of Juan Luis Vives*, translated by F. Watson (Cambridge, 1913), pp.121-22.
92. The *Legenda Aurea* was written c.1401. The first printed French translation I have traced is a 1477 edition (Lyons: Bartholomieu Buyer). I have taken all my quotations from the following edition: *La Grant et Vraye Légende Dorée et la vie des saintz et des saintes de paradis, translaté de Latin en françoys* [by Jean du Vignay] (Lyons: J. Lambany, 1529), BN Rés H 974.
93. See Léopold Delisle, *Le Cabinet des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Impériale*, 3 vols (Paris, 1868), I, pp.91-93.

94. Régis Boyer, 'An attempt to define the typology of Medieval hagiography', in *Hagiography and Medieval Literature: A Symposium* (Odense University Press, 1981), pp.27-36 (p.31).
95. See Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex. The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London, 1976), p.72.
96. Warner, p.77.
97. Anon, *La Vie de Madame Sainte Marguerite, Vierge et Martyre* (n.p., n.d.), BN Rés. p.H.14. Catholic writers of the sixteenth century continue to pray to St Marguerite as protector of women enduring the efforts of childbirth. See, for example, Salmon Macrin, E.23 (for bibliographical details, see Chapter 3, note 10).
98. Jean Bouchet, *L'histoire et cronicque de Clotaire.... Et de sa tresillustre espouse: madame sainte Radegonde extraicte au vray de plusieurs cronicques antiques et modernes* (Poitiers: Enguilbert de Marnef, 1518), BN Rés D. 67949(1), f.xvi ro.
99. Boyer, p.29.
100. Jennifer Britnell, *Jean Bouchet*, University of Durham Publications (Edinburgh, 1986), p.204. See also pp.202-205.

## NOTES

## CHAPTER THREE

1. All references are taken from *Oeuvres*, edited by J. Stecher, 4 vols (Louvain, 1882-91; reprinted Georg Olms Verlag Hildesheim, New York, 1972). *Les Illustrations* consists of three books. The first originally appeared in 1511 (Lyons: E. Baland); the second in 1512 (Lyons and Paris: E. Baland for G. de Marnef), and the final book in 1513 (Paris: G. de Marnef).
2. Stecher, *Notice*, III, p.li.
3. See C. Scollen, *The Birth of the Elegy in France 1500-1550* (Geneva, 1967), pp.157-59.
4. Georges Doutrepoint, *Jean Lemaire de Belges et la Renaissance* (Brussels, 1934; Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 1974), p.338.
5. For a general discussion of speech in Lemaire's works, see Jenkins, *Artful Eloquence*.
6. An analysis of the allegory of the three goddesses may be found in Ann Moss, *Poetry and Fable. Studies in Mythological Narrative in Sixteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, London, New York etc., 1984), pp.17-40.
7. See Moss, p.38.
8. In 1525, Jean Briault, a judge from Loudun (the poet's native town), introduced Macrin to Guillonne Boursault, his wife's sister. Macrin immediately fell in love with this fifteen-year old girl and was married three years later.
9. For a general survey of Macrin's life and works, see I.D. McFarlane, 'Jean Salmon Macrin (1490-1557)', *BHR*, 21 (1959), pp.55-84, pp.311-49, and 22 (1960), pp.73-89. A comprehensive bibliography of Macrin's works may be found in vol. 22, pp.84-89.
10. All references to these works are taken from *Le Livre des Epithalames (1528-1531); Les Odes de 1530 (Livres 1 et 2)*, edited by Georges Soubeille (Toulouse, 1978). The *Epithalamiorum Liber* was first published in 1528, under the title of *Carminum Libellus*. The new title may have been selected in order to make the work more marketable at a time when the epithalamium genre was in vogue. This change is certainly indicative of Macrin's interest in the theme of marriage. However, by strict definition, not one of the poems is a true epithalamium. The word comes from the Greek 'thalamos', meaning a bridal chamber, and refers to a nuptial song or poem in praise of the bride and groom. When quoting any extensive passage, I will transcribe Soubeille's elegant French translation. For the purpose of brevity, I will use the following abbreviations: E.: *Epithalamiorum Liber*; C.I.: *Carminum Liber Primus*; C.II.: *Carminum Liber Secundus*.

11. Soubeille, introduction, p.45.
12. C.III.6, quoted from Soubeille (introduction), p.66.
13. Macrin always signed all his works (even those written in Paris): 'Io Salmonii... Lodunatis'.
14. Evelyne, Berriot-Salvadore, *Les Femmes dans la Société Française de la Renaissance* (Geneva, 1990), p.249.
15. All references will be taken from *Les Quinze Joies de Mariage*, edited by Jean Rychner (Paris and Geneva, 1963). The enormous popularity of the work is underlined by the numerous editions which have appeared from the end of the fifteenth century right through to the present day. A list of editions of the *XV Joies* may be found under Antoine de la Sale, in the BN catalogue. One of the earliest editions is *Les Quinze Joies de Mariage* (Lyons: [1480-90]), BN Rés. Y<sup>2</sup> 152. For discussion of the date of composition, see Rychner, pp.xxxviii-xlvi.
16. *Les XV Joies* seems to have been influenced, in particular, by *Le Roman de la Rose*, edited by E. Langlois, Société des Anciens Textes Français, 5 vols (Paris, 1914-1924); *Les Lamentations de Mathéolus*, and Eustache Deschamps, *Le Miroir de Mariage*, in *Oeuvres Complètes de Eustache Deschamps*, edited by G. Raynaud and A.H.E. Queux de Saint Hilaire, Société des Anciens Textes Français, 11 vols (Paris, 1894), IX. Works inspired by the *XV Joies* include Anon., *Les Tenebres de Mariage*, in *Recueil de Poésies Françaises des XVe et XVIe Siècles*, edited by Anatole de Courde de Montaiglon, 13 vols (Paris, 1855-78), I, pp.17-32 (the earliest edition of this work seems to have been Lyons, 1546); Anon., *Sermon nouveau et fort joyeux, auquel est contenu tous les maux que l'homme a en mariage*, in *Recueil de Poésies Françaises*, II, pp.5-17 (the first printed edition of this piece is estimated c.1480); Jehan d'Ivry, *Les Secretz et Loix de Mariage*, in *Recueil de Poésies Françaises*, III, pp.168-203 (the work was probably composed at the beginning of the sixteenth century); Anon., *S'ensuyt la Complainte du Nouveau Marié*, in *Recueil de Poésies Françaises*, IV, pp.5-17 and Anon., *La Resolution d'Amours*, in *Recueil de Poésies Françaises*, XII, pp.307-26 (the earliest printed edition dates from c.1480).
17. In *Le Miroir de Mariage*, Deschamps actually cites Juvenal by name: 'Juvenaulx les mariez tance/ Et content qu'il n'est femme chaste' (p.98).
18. See *Roman de la Rose*, ll.13979-14052, (IV, pp.45-46).
19. See Matheolus, p.9; Deschamps, p.122.
20. *Les Quinze Joies de Mariage*, translated and introduced by Monique Santucci (Paris, 1986), p.151.
21. Santucci, p.151.

22. John Fox, *A Literary History of France. The Middle Ages* (London and New York, 1974), p.339.
23. Rychner, pp.xxxii-vii.
24. Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York, 1979), p.189.
25. Adrian Wilson, 'The Ceremony of Childbirth and its Interpretation', in *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England*, edited by Valerie Fildes (Routledge, London and New York, 1990), pp.68-107.
26. Wilson, p.71.
27. Wilson, p.71.
28. Wilson, p.75.
29. Wilson, p.87.
30. *Les Evangiles des Quenouilles* (Paris, 1855; Kraus Reprints, Nendeln/Liechtenstein, 1977). The *Evangiles* was written in the mid-fifteenth century. For a list of editions, see preface, pp.xii-xiv. The authorship of the work is uncertain. However, it has been attributed to a group of three men: Fouquart de Cambray, Anthoine du Val and Jean d'Arras (see preface, p.ix). For a comprehensive study of the text, see Anne Paupert, *Les Fileuses et Le Clerc: Une Étude des Evangiles des Quenouilles* (Paris and Geneva, 1990).
31. Per Nykrog, 'Playing games with fiction, *Les Quinze Joies de Mariage, Il Corbaccio, El Arcipreste de Talavera*', in *The Craft of Fiction. Essays in Medieval Poetics*, edited by Leigh Arrathoon (Rochester, 1984), pp.423-51 (p.427).
32. Rychner, p.xxv.
33. Santucci, p.15.
34. Santucci, p.164.
35. The *Heptaméron* was first published in 1558 by Pierre Boaistuau under the name of *Histoires des Amans Fortunez*. The following year, a new edition appeared by Claude Gruget, who adopted the present title for the work. The *Heptaméron* falls slightly outside the period of time selected for my thesis. However, I feel justified in including it, not solely on account of its obvious appropriateness for this particular study, but also because of the uncertainty over the precise dates of its actual composition. Most critics agree that many of the stories were written before 1540. Moreover, precise dates or events are alluded to in the text, many of which fall between 1500 and 1540 (see, for example, no.2, which mentions the birth of Marguerite de Navarre's son in 1530; or no.41, which contains a reference to the Treaty of Cambrai in 1529). Pierre Jourda in *Marguerite d'Angoulême, Duchesse*

*d'Alençon, Reine de Navarre (1492-1549): Etude Biographique et Littéraire*, 2 vols (Paris, 1930), II, pp.664-75 discusses in detail the question of dating the *Heptaméron*, concluding that it was probably begun before 1540. All references will be taken from the edition by Simone de Reyff (see Intro.1, note 11).

36. Terence Cave, 'The Mimesis of Reading in the Renaissance', in *Mimesis: From Mirror to Method, Augustine to Descartes*, edited by J.D. Lyons and S.G. Nichols, Jr. (Hanover and London, 1982), pp.149-65 (p.152).
37. Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, translated by G.H. McWilliam (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p.58
38. See Shirley W. Vinall and Peter S. Noble, 'Shrewd and Wanton Women: Adultery in the *Decameron* and the *Heptameron*', in *Women and Italy: Essays on Gender, Culture and History*, edited by Zygmunt G. Baranski and Shirley W. Vinall (New York, 1991), pp.141-172 (p.145).
39. For a discussion of this subject, see John D. Bernard, 'Sexual Oppression and Social Justice in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 19 (1989), 2, pp.251-81.
40. J.D. Bernard, p.252.
41. An interesting study on tale no.10 may be found in the chapter entitled 'Verba Erotica: Marguerite de Navarre and the Rhetoric of Silence', in Kritzman, *Rhetoric of Sexuality*, pp.45-56.
42. For a detailed survey of the storytellers and their relationships, see Betty J. Davis, *The Storytellers in Marguerite de Navarre's Heptaméron* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1978).



## NOTES

## INTRODUCTION: PART TWO

1. Elaine Showalter, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics', in *Twentieth Century Literary Theory*, pp.268-72 (p.269).
2. Showalter, p.269.
3. Béatrice Didier, *L'Ecriture-Femme* (Paris, 1991), p.5.
4. Didier, p.10.
5. My discussion of Kristeva is over simplified. For further reading, see Ruthven, pp.98-99; Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Writing the Body. Toward an understanding of l'Ecriture féminine', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, edited by Elaine Showalter (New York, 1985), pp.361-77; or see Kristeva's own writing.
6. *Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*, edited by Suzanne Solente, 4 vols (Paris, 1959), I, pp.51-52. The work was composed between 1400 and 1403. It was not printed during the sixteenth century, but exists in numerous manuscript versions (see introduction by S. Solente).
7. This translation of Cixous' *Le Rire de la Méduse* is taken from *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton, 1981), pp.245-64 (p.251). The original French version of Cixous' work may be found in *L'Arc* (1975), pp.39-54.
8. See Terry Castle, 'Lab'ring Bards: Birth Topoi and English Poetics 1660-1820', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 78 (April, 1979), pp.193-208.
9. Didier, pp.10-11.
10. Didier, p.34.
11. Didier, p.37.
12. Jones, p.299.
13. Joanna Russ, 'What can a heroine do? Or why women can't write', in *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, edited by S. Koppelman (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1978), pp.3-20 (p.13).

14. Quoted from Ruthven, p.108.
15. *New French Feminisms*, p.260.
16. *Women and Men Speaking*, p.24.
17. Didier, p.12.
18. Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre du Chemin de Long Estude*, edited by R. Püschel (Berlin, 1887; Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 1974), pp.4-5. An edition of this text was printed by Groulleau in Paris (1549), see BN Rés. Y<sup>2</sup> 2020.
19. Quoted from La Croix du Maine and Du Verdier, *Les Bibliothèques Françaises*, 6 vols (Paris, Saillant and Nyon, 1772-73), V, p.196. La Croix du Maine only reproduces extracts of *Les Soupirs* and I have been unable to discover a complete edition of the poem. The whole work consists of 500 lines (La Croix du Maine, p.195). Philiberte's work has been dated c.1540, see *La Poésie Féminine du XIIe au XIXe Siècle*, edited by Jeanine Moulin (Paris, 1966), p.116.
20. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London, Glasgow, Toronto etc., 1989), p.41.

## NOTES

## CHAPTER FOUR

1. Héli-senne's first work, *Les Angoysses douloureuses qui procedent d'amours* was composed in 1538 and published in Paris by Denis Janot (see BN Rés. p. Z. 2013). The work is divided into three sections. For Part One, my references are taken from *Les Angoysses douloureuses*, edited by Paule Demats (Paris, 1968). For Parts Two and Three, I have quoted from *Les Oeuvres* (Paris, 1560; Slatkine Reprints, Geneva, 1977). In 1539, Héli-senne's next work *Les Epistres familiares et invectives* appeared in Paris (also by Denis Janot). References to these letters are from *Les Oeuvres*. For a translation and discussion of the letters, see *A Renaissance Woman - Héli-senne's personal and invective letters*, translated and edited by Marianna M. Mustacchi and Paul J. Archambault (Syracuse, 1986). *Les Epistres* consist of eighteen prose letters addressed to friends and family; some telling news or offering advice, others relating the story of Héli-senne's love, found in the *Angoysses*. Héli-senne de Crenne's two other works are her dream allegory *Le Songe* (Paris: Denis Janot, 1540), and her translation of the first four books of Virgil's *Aeneid* (Paris: Denis Janot, 1541). For a discussion of the latter work, see Christine M. Scollen-Jimack, 'Héli-senne de Crenne, Octovien de Saint-Gelais and Virgil', *Studi Francesi* 26 (May-April, 1982), pp.197-210. Héli-senne's translation of Virgil serves as proof that, in spite of the advice of treatise writers, at least some sixteenth-century women were well versed in Latin. Moreover, the very fact that Héli-senne published her translation indicates that she felt in no way compelled to conceal her talents.
2. Articles which have proved useful for this section of my thesis include Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, 'La Dualité Structurale des *Angoysses*', *Revue Frontenac*, 2 (1984), pp.1-8; Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, 'Erudition and Aphasia in Héli-senne de Crenne's *Les Angoysses douloureuses qui procedent d'amours*', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 29, no.3 (1989), pp.36-42; Tom Conley, 'Feminism, Ecriture, and the Closed Room: The *Angoysses douloureuses qui procedent d'amours*', *Symposium*, 27, no.4 (Winter 1973), pp. 322-31; Luce Guillermin, 'La Prison des textes ou *Les Angoysses douloureuses qui procedent d'amours* d'Héli-senne de Crenne (1538)', *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, 196 (1984), pp.9-23; Anne R. Larsen, 'The Rhetoric of Self-Defence in *Les Angoysses douloureuses qui procedent d'amours* (Part One)', *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 29 (1982), pp.235-43; Colette H. Winn, 'La Symbolique du regard dans *Les Angoysses douloureuses qui procedent d'amours* d'Héli-senne de Crenne', *Orbis Litterarum*, 40 (1985), pp. 207-21 and Jerry C. Nash, '"Exerçant oeuvres viriles": Feminine Anger and Feminist (Re) Writing in Héli-senne de Crenne', *L'Esprit Créateur*, XXX, 4, *Writing in the Feminine in the Renaissance* (1990), pp.38-48.
3. Larsen, p.237.
4. It is interesting to find Jeanne Flore, in her *Comptes Amoureux* (see below, note 24), also describing the jealous husband in similar terms: 'Et certes bien folz et meschans sont ilz, ceulx qui veullent asseurer leurs jalouses fantaisies en la clousture des murs inaccessibles, des chambres secrettes et fermées, en la vigilance des cent yeulx d'Argus, en la fidelité soigneuse des Eunuches, et de ces vieilles soupnoneuses' (p.200).

5. Demats, introduction.
6. See, for example, Gustave Reynier, *Le Roman Sentimental avant l'Astrée* (Paris, 1908), p.122: 'Tel est dans son ensemble ce singulier ouvrage, si peu cohérent dans sa composition, où s'expriment tour à tour, sans craindre de s'opposer, toutes les tendances de cette époque où ne manquent à coup sûr ni l'expression vive et pittoresque ni le sens du pathétique'.
7. Didier, p.14.
8. *La Concorde des Deux Langages*, edited by J. Frappier (Paris, 1947), p.35.
9. Louise Labé, *OEuvres*, edited by Charles Boy (Paris, 1887; Slatkine Reprints, Paris and Geneva, 1981), p.3.
10. *Renaissance Feminism*, pp.176-77.
11. 'La Dualité Structurale', p.5.
12. 'La Dualité Structurale', p.4.
13. Sartre, *Les Séquestrés D'Altona* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p.16.
14. *Women and Men Speaking*, p.18.
15. *The Délie of Maurice Scève*, edited by Ian McFarlane (Cambridge, 1966), p.120.
16. *OEuvres Poétiques précédées des Rymes de Pernette du Guillet avec un choix de Blasons du Corps féminin*, edited by Françoise Charpentier (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), Elegy 1, p.98.
17. See Demats, Appendix 1, p.102.
18. 'Erudition and Aphasia', p.37.
19. All line references are taken from *La Coche*, edited by R. Marichal, Textes Littéraires Français (Geneva, 1971). For a discussion of the text's date of composition, see Marichal, pp.35-40.
20. See Robert D. Cottrell, *The Grammar of Silence: A Reading of Marguerite de Navarre's Poetry* (Washington D.C., 1986), pp.225-26.
21. Cottrell discusses this theme in some detail, see pp.233-34.

22. In the preface to Cottrell's discussion of Marguerite de Navarre (p.ix), he states that many of the author's works were actually composed in her coach, during trips across France. Hence, for the author herself, the coach must have represented an important place, as a site for escape into writing.
23. Cottrell, pp.231-32.
24. All references will be taken from *Contes Amoureux par Madame Jeanne Flore*, edited by the Centre Lyonnais d'Étude de l'Humanisme (Lyons, 1980). The earliest printed edition of the text is undated, but has been estimated at 1537 (see *Contes Amoureux*, intro., p.16) and not 1574 as the BN catalogue proposes: *Comptes Amoureux* (Lyons: [Denys de Harsay], n.d.), BN Rés. Y<sup>2</sup> 1979. *La Pugnition de l'Amour* first appeared in 1540 (Lyons: François Juste), BN Rés. Ye 3439. The text is an abridged version of the *Comptes*, including only four of the seven tales (nos 2, 3, 4, and 5). It is thought that both works are drawn from a longer, unknown edition, possibly entitled *L'Amour Fatal* (for discussion, see *Contes Amoureux*, intro., pp.9-19).
25. Doubts regarding the author's gender appear to be relatively recent, for in the second part of the seventeenth century, Louis Moreri confidently states: 'Jeanne Flore, fille sçavante qui écrivit un Livre de contes amoureux' (*Le Grand Dictionnaire Historique Ou Le Mélange Curieux De L'Histoire Sacrée Et Profane*, 2 vols (Lyons, 1681), II, p.280). For discussion of the author's identity see, for example: Claude Longeon, 'Du Nouveau Sur Les *Comptes Amoureux* de Madame Jeanne Flore', *BHR*, 44 (1982), pp.605-13, or Regine Reynolds-Cornell, 'Madame Jeanne Flore and the *Comptes Amoureux*: A Pseudonym and a Paradox', *BHR*, 51 (1989), pp.123-33.
26. Reynolds-Cornell, p.126.
27. The account of Nastagio constitutes the eighth story of the fifth day of Boccaccio's *Decameron*.
28. The name 'Briolayne Fusque', having no mythological basis, stands out as something of an anomaly. As support for the hypothesis that Flore is a man, it has been suggested (see Reynolds-Cornell, p.130) that this name is an anagram spelling 'Ne fus que briolay', that is to say, 'It was only a game' (a 'briole' being a trap or a subterfuge).
29. See *Contes Amoureux*, intro., pp.12-15.
30. Gabriel Pérouse, *Nouvelles Françaises du XVIe Siècle: Images de la Vie du Temps* (Geneva, 1977), p.83.
31. Jean-Philippe Beaulieu, 'L'Ambiguïté Didactique dans les *Comptes Amoureux* de Jeanne Flore', *Neophilologus*, 72 (January, 1988), pp.1-9 (p.5).
32. Daniela Rossi, 'Erotismo e Sensualità Ambientale nei *Comptes Amoureux* di Jeanne Flore', in *La Nouvelle Française à la Renaissance*, edited by Lionello Sozzi (Geneva and Paris, 1981), pp. 285-95 (p.286).

33. *Images Littéraires de la femme*, p.128.
34. See Pérouse, p.97.
35. For discussion of this theme, see Lisette Girouard, 'Paroles de femmes dans les *Comptes Amoureux* de Jeanne Flore', *Moyen Français*, 1 (1977), pp.119-30.
36. See *Contes Amoureux*, intro, pp.47-74.
37. 'L'Ambiguïté didactique', p.8.

## NOTES

## CHAPTER FIVE

1. *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* first appeared in 1531, published by Simon Du Bois in Alençon (BN Rés. Ye 203). A further twelve editions of the work came into print during the course of the sixteenth century, proving the popularity of the text. For the purpose of this study, I have taken my line references from a modern edition: Marguerite de Navarre, *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*, edited by Renja Salminen (Helsinki, 1979). The *Dialogue en forme de vision nocturne* was written following the death of Francis I's daughter, Charlotte, on September 8th 1524. The text was only published once in the sixteenth century, appearing in Simon Du Bois' 1533 edition of *Le Miroir* (BN Rés. Ye 209). All my quotations refer to *Dialogue en forme de vision nocturne*, edited by Pierre Jourda, *Revue du seizième siècle*, 13 (1926), pp.1-49.
2. Jourda, *Marguerite d'Angoulême*, I, p.380.
3. Cottrell, p.236.
4. Paradoxical role reversals also form a recurrent theme in Marguerite's plays. In *Le Mallade* (composed c.1535), it is the eloquent chambermaid who finds a remedy for the ailing patient by converting him to Christianity. In a similar fashion, the play *L'Inquisiteur* (c.1536) depicts an old inquisitor who is finally converted to the evangelical faith by a group of young children. The children speak in metaphors, a language which the inquisitor, whose speech remains at a literal level, is unable to understand. See *Théâtre Profane*, edited by V.L. Saulnier (Paris, 1946).
5. Cottrell, 104.
6. *Guillaume Briçonnet-Marguerite d'Angoulême Correspondance (1521-1524)*, edited by Christine Martineau, Michel Veissière, and Henry Heller, 2 vols (Geneva, 1975-79), I, p.27, I, p.27 and I, p.28.
7. Cottrell, pp.30-31.
8. For a detailed discussion of these tableaux, see Cottrell, Chapter 5, pp.95-130, or Paula Sommers, *Celestial Ladders: Readings in Marguerite de Navarre's Poetry of Spiritual Ascent* (Geneva, 1989), Chapter 3, pp. 49-66.
9. The metaphor depicting the Soul as bride, desiring to unite in marriage with Christ, is a common one in Christian mystics. Its origins are biblical, lying in passages from Paul's epistles (and, in particular, Ephesians 5: 22-33), the Song of Songs and Apocalypse. However, Marguerite's main source for her marriage metaphor may no doubt be found in the letters of Briçonnet, whose descriptions of this union are often sensual, if not erotic (see the letter dated 13th June in *Guillaume Briçonnet-Marguerite d'Angoulême*, II, pp.163-64).

10. Showalter, p.269.
11. 'Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction', in N.K. Miller, *Subject to Change. Reading Feminist Writing* (New York, 1988), pp.25-46, (p.28).
12. On the whole, the references which I have found to Gabrielle de Bourbon tend to be of a biographical nature. See, for example L. Sandret, *Louis II de la Trémoille* (Paris, 1881), pp.21 ff; Auguste Hamon, *Un Grand Rhétoricien poitevin, Jean Bouchet, 1476-1557?* (Paris, 1901), pp.56-61; J. Britnell, esp. pp.229-230; E. Berriot-Salvadore, p.416 (in such a comprehensive survey of sixteenth-century women, it is surprising to find no more than a fleeting mention of Gabrielle de Bourbon).
13. For mention of Gabrielle de Bourbon, see *Le Panégyrique du Chevalier Sans Reproche, ou Mémoires de la Trémoille*, edited by M. Petitot (Paris, 1820), Chapters XII, XIII, XX and XXVII; *L'histoire et cronique de Clotaire*, sig.aal ro-vo; *Le Jugement poetic de l'honneur femenin*, ff.lx ro-vo; *Les Annales d'Acquitaine* (Poitiers: Enguilbert de Marnef, 1557), BN Lk1.25.H, f.203 ro; *Epistres Morales et Familieres*, *Ep.Fam.* nos IX, X, and XI are addressed to Gabrielle de Bourbon. *Epître X*, a letter written from the Soul to Christ, and *Epître XI*, written from the Virgin Mary on the subject of her son's passion, reflect the themes of Gabrielle's own writing.
14. I am indebted to Dr J. Britnell for so kindly lending me her microfilms of Gabrielle de Bourbon's manuscripts: *Ung petit traicté sur les douleurs de la passion du doulx Jesus et de sa benoiste mere, pour lesquelles voir et sentir le cueur contemplatif amene avecques soy l'ame devote*, Chartrier de Thouars 1AP 220; *Le Voyage spirituel entrepris par l'ame devote pour parvenir en la cité de bon repoux*, Bibliothèque Mazarine, MS 978. In this same manuscript, there is also *Le Fort Chasteau pour la retraicte de toutes bonnes ames, fait par le commandement du glorieux saint esperit*. The first two works will be studied in detail, while only brief reference will be made to *Le Fort Chasteau*. The manuscripts are not paginated.
15. L. Sandret, p.93, note 1.
16. Gabrielle is not, of course, the first to employ personification allegory to Christian ends. The first full-scale work of this kind was probably Prudentius' *Psychomachia* (c.405 AD), beginning a trend which would remain popular throughout the medieval period.
17. A. Hamon, p.57, note 2.
18. Gabrielle's personal interest in tapestry is attested by *Le Panégyrique* where we learn that 'elle estoit liberalle et magnificque en... tapisseries' (p.127).
19. The same theme is found in Catherine d'Amboise's *Le Livre des Prudens et Imprudens* (see below, note 24): 'de raconter plus amplement de son accoustrement m'en tais de peur d'encourir le vice de prolixité' (f.3 vo) or 'Par quoy pour eviter toute prolicité de langaige, contrainte suis imposer fin en mon euvre (ff.135 vo-136 ro).



20. Jean Bouchet, *Les Triumphe de la noble et amoureuse dame* (Poitiers: Jacques Bouchet, 1530), Bibliothèque Municipale de Poitiers, BM 2. For a discussion of this work, see Britnell, pp.221-257.
21. Britnell, p.229.
22. Britnell, p.229.
23. A brief discussion of Catherine's writing may be found in the following works: Jeanine Moulin, 'Quelques poétesses oubliées et méconnues', *Annales*, 102 (April, 1959), pp.36-40; E. Berriot-Salvadore, pp.417-420.
24. Catherine d'Amboise, *Le Livre des Prudens et Imprudens des Siècles Passés* (1509), Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, ms. 2037. *Le Livre des Prudens et Imprudens* does not exist in printed form. The numerous beautiful illuminations found in the manuscript, making the work a costly article, attest to the author's nobility. The page numbering has been added in a later hand.
25. Catherine was the daughter of Charles d'Amboise, seigneur de Chaumont, who was employed by Louis XI as governor of the Ile-de-France, Champagne and Bourgogne.
26. Catherine d'Amboise, *Les Devotes Epistres de Katherine d'Amboise*, edited by J.J. Bourassé (Tours, 1861). A manuscript version may be found under BN ms. 8033 (Ancien fonds français). The *Devotes Epistres* are undated, but were composed later than *Le Livre des Prudens*, which Catherine, begging her reader's leniency, declares to be 'le myen premier coup d'essay' (f.6 ro).
27. Catherine was actually married and widowed three times, her husbands being Christophe de Tournon, Philibert de Beaujeu and Louis de Clèves.
28. *La Correspondance d'Erasmus*, edited by Marie Delcourt, 12 vols (Brussels, 1968), I, pp.3-4.
29. For a study of the book as both a public gift and a gift of friendship, see Nathalie Zemon Davis, 'Beyond the Market: Books as Gifts in Sixteenth-Century France', *Royal Historical Society Transactions*, 5th series, vol 33 (1983), pp.69-88.
30. Catherine d'Amboise would certainly have been familiar with the life of Catherine of Alexandria (found in the popular *Légende Dorée*). She may also have known about Catherine of Siena. Both saints are said to have experienced the divine marriage.
31. Berriot-Salvadore, p.419.
32. Jeanne de Jussie, *Le Levain du Calvinisme au commencement de l'hérésie de Genève*, edited by A.C. Grivel (Geneva, 1865), p.173. The work was not published in the author's lifetime and, as far as I know, the original manuscript version no longer exists. The most recent edition remains the 1865 edition from which I will be quoting all references. This text is a reprint of a much earlier edition which first appeared in Chambéry in 1611. According to the introduction of a 1682 edition of the work,

entitled *Relation de l'apostasie de Genève* (Paris), it would seem that several other editions appeared around the same time as the first one: 'modestie ne luy ayant pas permis de publier cet Ecrit pendant sa vie, Il demeura à sa mort entre les mains d'un Pere Capucin de ses Amis, qui le fist imprimer hors du Royaume vers le commencement de ce siècle, mais Cette Edition et quelques autres se firent presque en mesme temps, et sont toutes remplies de tant de fautes... qu'il est demeuré presque inconnu jusqu'à present... en ayant recouvert diverses copies j'ay esté conseillé par plusieurs Personnes de pieté et de sçavoir, de le redonner au Public dans le meilleur estat qu'il m'a esté possible' (sig. a2 ro). The actual date of composition of *Le Levain* is unknown. However, considering its form as a diary, it seems reasonable to assume that the work was not written at one specific time, but continually updated over a number of years (c.1526-c.1535). The original title of Jussie's text, *Histoire Mémorable du Commencement de l'Hérésie de Geneve* was changed by a seventeenth-century editor to *Le Levain du Calvinisme*, with the desire, no doubt, of using it as part of the religious polemic at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The editor's title is highly inappropriate, for Calvin's name never actually features within the text. For studies on Jeanne de Jussie, see *Images Littéraires de la Femme*, esp. pp.158-59; Berriot-Salvadore, pp.429-32.

33. Jeanne de Jussie's account of Marie Dentièrre seems to be fairly accurate. Originally abbess of a convent in Tournai, in the 1520's Dentièrre abandoned her position in order to marry a former priest by the name of Simon Robert. After Robert's death in 1533, Dentièrre married the reformer and chronicler Anthoine Fromment. According to public records, Dentièrre was the mother of three, not five children. See Thomas Head, 'A propagandist for the reform: Marie Dentièrre', in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, edited by Katherina M. Wilson (Athens, Georgia and London, 1987), pp. 260-83 (p.261).
34. Anthoine Fromment, *Les Actes et Gestes Merveilleux de la Cité de Genève*, edited by Gustave Revilliod (Geneva, 1854). Fromment's chronicle was completed by 1554, but, following a refusal of permission to publish, the work only appeared for the first time in the nineteenth century. *Les Actes* is a record of events in Geneva, beginning with the year 1532.
35. *Le Levain* also notes Claudine Levet's role as preacher ('la femme de Hemme Levet Apoticaire, qui se mesloit de prescher', p.185), describing her attempt to convert the nuns of St Clare to the new faith.
36. Jane Dempsey Douglass, *Women, Freedom, and Calvin* (Philadelphia, 1985), p.105. For discussion of Marie Dentièrre and Jeanne de Jussie, see pp. 98-105.
37. Sermon on Eph.5:3-5, quoted in Willis P. DeBoer, 'Calvin on the Role of Women', in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, edited by D.E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids, 1976), pp.236-72 (p.249).
38. For further reading on this subject, see W.P. DeBoer or Jane Dempsey Douglass, 'Christian Freedom: What Calvin Learned at the School of Women', *Church History*, 53 (1984), pp.155-73; J.L. Thompson, *Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah* (Geneva, 1992), or Larissa Taylor, 'The Preachers and Women', in *Soldiers of Christ. Preaching in Late Medieval and Reformation France* (New York Oxford, 1992), pp.156-78.

39. *Calvin's Commentaries: The Second Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, translated by T.A. Smail (Edinburgh and London, 1964), p.217.
40. Marie Dentièrre, *La Guerre et deslivrance de la ville de Genesve*, in *Memoires et documents publiés par la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Genève*, edited by A. Rilliet, 20 (1881), pp. 309-76. In the introduction to this edition ('Restitution de l'écrit intitulé la Guerre et Deslivrance de la ville de Genesve'), Rilliet notes the existence of two eighteenth-century manuscripts; his own text being based on the more accurate copy held in Geneva. Both manuscripts make reference to 'un livret imprimé' from which the copyists have transcribed the work, suggesting the one-time existence of a sixteenth-century printed edition, published, no doubt, in 1536. I have included Rilliet's own editorial corrections, placed in square brackets, which may help to clarify the meaning of the text. For works on Marie Dentièrre, see T. Head, pp.260-83; *Images Littéraires de la Femme*, pp.165-73; Madeleine Lazard, 'Deux soeurs ennemies, Marie Dentièrre et Jeanne de Jussie: nonnes et réformées à Genève', in *Les Réformes, enracinement socio-culturel*, XXVe colloque international d'études humanistes (1985), pp.239-49; several brief references also occur in Berriot-Salvadore.
41. T. Head, p.261.
42. Spender, p.19.
43. A. Rilliet, p.318. The editor's insistence on referring to Dentièrre as if she were male ('le', 'il') is particularly inexcusable considering that Rilliet himself was responsible for identifying the author of *La Guerre* as Marie Dentièrre.
44. T. Head, p.262.
45. This reference to St Clare's convent is the only one found in *La Guerre*, in spite of our knowledge from *Le Levain* that Dentièrre played an important role in the dispersal of the nuns. Her silence is revealing, for avoidance of this subject must be part of a deliberate ploy to remain anonymous. The 'grands miracles' refer to the conversion of the convent into a hospital after the nuns' departure in August 1535.
46. A gauge of the success of the pun is that Dentièrre's husband, Fromment, incorporates it into his own slightly later work (see *Les Actes*, p.218).
47. The *Défense pour les femmes* and extracts from the *Epistre* itself may be found in the appendix of Rilliet's edition of *La Guerre*, pp.377-84. The *Lettre d'envoi*, printed in its entirety, and extracts of the main letter are included in *Correspondance des réformateurs dans les pays de langue française*, edited by A.L. Herminjard (Geneva, 1874), V, pp. 295-304. References to Herminjard's text will be specifically noted as such. Dentièrre's letter was first published with the false imprint 'Nouvellement imprimée à Anvers chez Martin l'empereur MVXXXIX' (Rilliet, p.377). The work was actually published in Geneva in April 1539 by the printer Jehan Gérard. Gérard was imprisoned on account of this clandestine edition and the majority of the 1,500 copies of the text were confiscated from him. Consequently, the original edition is now very rare, being held in the Musée Historique de la Réformation in Geneva.

48. An extract from the 'Papiers de Fromment' indicates the *raison d'être* of the *Epistre très utile*: 'Il advint en ce temps (c'est-à-dire en 1538), que la royne de Navarre, seur du roy de France, voulut sçavoir d'une sienne commère, nommée Marie Dentièrre, de Tournay, femme de Fromment, la première femme déchassée pour l'Evangile, de nostre temps, ayant layssé son abbaye et monestère, demourant à présent à Genève, -voulut sçavoir de ses nouvelles et pourquoy on avoit deschassé les ministres de la parolle de Dieu dans Genève' (Rilliet, p.326).
49. By the time the *Epistre très utile* was composed, Marguerite de Navarre's reputation as writer was already well-established. Moreover, Marguerite herself must have been only too aware of the problems awaiting the woman writer who delves into the theological domain of writing; her own work *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* being the cause of considerable dispute when the Sorbonne attempted to censor it in October 1533.
50. Calvin himself corresponded with many noblewomen, urging them to espouse the evangelical cause, with the hope that they would exert some influence over princes or kings of the royal households. See Nancy L. Roelker, 'The Appeal of Calvinism to French Noblewomen in the Sixteenth Century', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1972), pp.391-418, or Charmarie Jenkins Blaisdell, 'Renée de France between Reform and Counter-Reform', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 63 (1972), pp.196-225.
51. The same technique is employed by Fromment who depicts himself as the principal protagonist of his work: 'Il est venu ung homme en ceste ville qui veult enseigner à lire et escrire en françois' (p.13).
52. Introduction to *Le Levain* (unpaginated).
53. This sort of dispersal of the religious orders was obviously common. See Miriam Chrisman 'Women and the Reformation in Strasbourg 1490-1530', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 63 (1972), pp.143-67 (p.165).
54. For further discussion on this subject, see Nathalie Zemon Davis, 'City Women and Religious Change'.

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